HODDER AND STOUGHTON

GOD IN THE SLUMS

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Hugh Redwood

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GOD IN THE SLUMS

TO
MY SISTERS
OF
THE SLUMS

Books by

Hugh Redwood

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GOD IN THE SLUMS

BY

HUGH REDWOOD

They said unto him, Rabbi, (which is to say, being interpreted, Master,) where dwellest thou? He saith unto them, Come and see.

ST. JOHN I, 38, 39.

HODDER AND STOUGHTON

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INTRODUCTION TO THE TWENTY-SEVENTH REVISED EDITION

"GOD IN THE SLUMS" was first published in the autumn of 1930, and inevitably it dates. But those who now read it for the first time, or renew acquaintance with it in this revised edition, may find in that fact a point of particular interest.

It begins with a date—January 7, 1928—which, when it was written, seemed assured of a place in history, or at least in the story of the metropolis. It was the date of something that, by current standards, was a London calamity. But what kind of place in history can the Thames floods claim in competition with the monstrous events of a war which has broken all barriers, and has overlaid the memory of a localised tragedy with the debris of towns and cities?

Yet the date has more than a little significance, for the world at large as well as for the man who made it the starting point of a book. For him, indeed, it must always be associated with a tide which took him at the flood and swept him on to fortunes he never dreamed of. But for the multitude as well, though in a different sense, that year was a *tidal* year. It was a midway year; it lay midway between what we then called the Great War and the other war already in preparation to dwarf it. And there is plenty which, seen in retrospect, suggests that the Spirit of God was specially active at this midway period, "moving upon the face of the waters"; that it was, in fact, an acutely critical period in the religious life of the British people. "Catastrophe is not far distant: unless Christianity takes up the gauntlet it is inevitable." The words occur early in "God in the Slums." They were written with reference to slumdom, but they were true of social and spiritual conditions in general; and this book, in its author's belief, was simply one of a very large number of instruments which were used by God, in varying place and measure, to challenge the public mind and bring it face to face with decision. Christianity, as we now know, did not take up the gauntlet. Had it done so—not on a single issue only, but on all the great issues confronting it—how differently history might have been written.

A Prime Minister of Great Britain came so near to calling

this nation to God that he started drafting his message. It was left unfinished, "owing to the pressure of political business," and thus a voice was never raised which might then have commanded a world-wide hearing. The Free Churches spoke, far too late; the Primate even later: by then the people were not in a mood to respond. The record of those critical years is a record of wasted chances and lost tides.

To bring "God in the Slums" up to date would have meant re-writing it. It has been deemed better to leave it substantially unaltered, including the postscript which originally took the place of a preface and which called on religion to throw off its defeatism. But some note must be taken of many changes.

Let it be said of the Salvation Army, whose specialised work the book describes, that it did in large part answer the challenge. Within a few weeks of reading its appeal for "a crusade of determined friendliness," General Higgins, then at the head of the Army's affairs, founded a League of Goodwill which brought to the aid of his slum workers a powerful auxiliary army of friends belonging to all denominations. The cramped post at Hoxton, described in chapter four, has given place to a splendid Goodwill Centre with a frontage on the New North Road, an eloquent epitome of operations throughout the country.

Even before the war came, of course, clearance schemes had made an end of some of the districts with which the book deals. The blitz has blasted others out of existence. The Abbey-street centre in Bermondsey, mentioned in the closing chapter, is one of many posts destroyed by Hitler's bombs. But slums remain, new slums are being created, new calls to work in the slums are being answered, and at bottom the story remains the same. The heroism of the slum officer shines all the more brightly in the flames of war, nor has it fallen short of the ultimate sacrifice.

Two girl officers, captain and lieutenant, gave their lives in Southwark. One of the shelters which they were visiting during a heavy raid received a direct hit, and they were buried under the wreckage. The lieutenant became an officer through reading "God in the Slums." The policeman did not know her name when those who were seeking her body asked him for news of her, but he shared the people's grief at the death of "the little lass with the smile."

One of the things which the war has taught Christians is that they do not possess a monopoly of all the so-called

Christian virtues. It is good for their souls that they should recognise it; that they should be reminded of the numberless deeds of courage, love and self-denial performed by those who make no religious profession. But even so, the war-time chronicles of the slum posts should stir every Christian heart. Consider one major, allegedly possessed of a weak heart, who put in a request for a mobile canteen and, being denied same, promptly improvised one of her own. It consisted of an invalid chair, carrying a huge urn on its seat, with a couple of 1-gallon teapots wedged between urn and handles. Thirty cups were packed into a water-bucket on the foot-rest. The major pushed this contraption, her captain walked beside it bearing another bucket-load of cups. Night after night, braving bombs and shrapnel, the "mobile" made its perambulations, and if "raiders passed" called folks from their shelters before the tea was exhausted, the officers took what was left to the men of the rescue and fire-fighting squads.

This was in a town with a dockyard, a town which has provided many stories to show how worthy the people are of those who strive to serve them. The cellar shelter of one consumptive woman became famous for the number of times it escaped when adjacent premises were hit. Even the sceptical grew convinced that "there must be something in it." It was a place for prayer-meetings: it witnessed conversions. Also it witnessed a seemingly miraculous return of strength to its tenant. Four or five years ago she appeared to be dying, but to-day, as these lines are being written, she is working in the dockyard with scores of her neighbours.

A "near miss" for the dockyard one night completely demolished the slum post, which lay very close to its wall. Within the yard next morning sailors discovered the remnants of a Salvation Army flag, blown with other debris into their midst. They mounted the wall to hand them back to their owners and, discovering that the post was no more, they erected a flag-staff there on the wall and hoisted the "Blood and Fire" tatters upon it "to cheer the Army girls up." "And you can be sure it did," says the mobile-propelling major, who has been cheering up people for most of her life.

Much could be written about the later adventures of some of the central figures in "God in the Slums." "The Colonel" of the opening chapter has married, so has the lieutenant with the sack, so has the girl with the Somerset accent. But all three are still on active service, the first in one of Salvationism's highest offices, the second mothering a Goodwill

League training centre for youths in South Wales, the third (still talking good Somerset after thrilling adventures in France at the time of Dunkirk) toiling hard for men of the services. "The major" is, nominally, retired, but in the Salvation Army that means chiefly that she has been set free from administrative duties and now has more time to give to the work that always lay nearest her heart.

As for "Big Brother," the tide has swept him far. He is no longer a night editor: God who makes all things new has given him a new job in journalism. But that story has been told elsewhere. In chapter seven he has related how he went to an open-air meeting in Brighton with a certain greengrocer. It is time for him to stop writing this introduction now, for he has an appointment with this same greengrocer which neither of them could then have envisaged. Bob is a soldier to-day, but still a Salvationist, and because he has been talking to a padre in a West Country town, Big Brother and he are going to join forces again next Sunday and tell, in a very different setting, the story they told that night in the wind and the rain. For the war has made this more certain than ever: it is the only story that matters.

Orpington, Kent *March*, 1942. HUGH REDWOOD.

In the early morning hours of Saturday, January 7, 1928, the Thames, gorged by an alliance of flood in its upper reaches with a driving gale at its mouth, gathered its unsuspected strength and, at the moment of highest spring tide, breached its containing wall at Westminster, little more than a quarter of a mile above the Houses of Parliament.

A great volume of muddy water burst into the low-lying agglomeration of humble streets to which the Grosvenor Road, between Lambeth Bridge and the Tate Gallery, forms a riverside frontage. Hundreds of people living and sleeping in basements, as of need they still must do, even though their dwellings are shadowed by the palaces of Government and Industry, and watched from the towers of cathedraled religion, woke to find a torrent swirling about their beds; ten of them choked to death as they fought with it in the darkness; scores of them lost their little all.

And one of the morning newspapers "got away with it." In a special edition, printed at half-past four, it achieved the perpetual desire of Fleet Street and scooped a big London story—the biggest and best London story, indeed, for many years. Three of its editorial workers, homeward bound after the labours of the night, had found the Embankment tramway service disorganised, had been swift to discover the reason and swifter still to return to duty, passing the stand-by warning to dispersing staffs.

The night editor was very well pleased with them, and with himself. True, he had had as little to do with it as the night editors of all the other papers, who, with him, had betaken themselves to the suburbs at midnight or thereabouts in comfortable ignorance of what was then impending. But whereas the other night editors overturned their breakfast trays that morning, as they leaped out of bed to the telephone with their eyes a-goggle over what they had just glimpsed in a rival sheet, his own thrill was of an order far more pleasant, and his own conversation over the telephone sweetened by the knowledge that the glory of that scoop was his vicariously, because his own "boys" had put it over.

So he settled himself at ease in the railway carriage corner,

after a dash up to town, and by way of giving himself a relish for lunch opened the "evening" paper—printed somewhere before noon—to see how the story was developing. And that is how this book came to be written.

The journalist sees everything as a "story." The broadest comedy, the most poignant tragedy are alike "stories"; the cynicism which he generally affects, but which is very seldom more than an affectation, arises from the fact that he is to himself a "story," with his public and his private doings, his interests and his very beliefs always in danger of being assessed at news-page value. The ability to see Life as News is the first of good qualities in a journalist, but, in the absence of some powerful corrective, it may, and quite frequently does, become a curse. It is a constant menace to sincerity.

The story of the Westminster floods was full of what journalism is pleased to call "human interest." It needed no elaboration: the stark horror, the sordidness of it spoke far more eloquently from the jerky account, hastily patched together from a dozen sources by the evening paper sub-editor than from the glib narrative of a descriptive writer. And the night editor, reading as one to whom it had not yet been told in detail, suddenly found his attention gripped by the facts themselves, instead of by the mechanics of their presentation. It was a grip that tightened rapidly: at the end of a twenty minutes' journey he had ceased to be concerned with the manner in which a news emergency had been handled in the night, and was asking himself, with a strange blend of excitement and irritation, whether there was nothing that he, as an ordinary member of the public, could do, now, for the victims of the disaster.

Seldom had he experienced anything quite like this. An impulse was upon him, so definite that it was almost a command—yet something gentler than a command—to turn back to town and make his way into the muddied streets of Westminster on the chance of finding a share in the relief work which he knew would be in progress. Against it there battled a selfishness, mainly physical, which told him that he was tired, after a crowded and exacting week; that this was Saturday, his one afternoon of relaxation; that the stress of work would return to-morrow; and that, in any case, an individual unattached could do little but get in the way of organised workers. His irritation was with himself. He was doubtful whether his better motives rang true; whether there was not all the time, in the back of his mind, the thought that

this act of a weary professional man, giving up his well-earned rest in order to toil (under the eyes of a sight-seeing crowd) amid the dirt and devastation of the flood area, was an excellent and moving "story," even though it might never get into print.

Cause and effect—what a fascinating, frightening, study. Of all that turned upon the issue of that conflict he was utterly without knowledge or idea, yet great things hung in the balance as he hesitated, mighty things affecting multitudes, linking him up with the lives and the sorrows and the consolations of the poor, the blind, the aged, the crippled and the lonely; bringing him the love and the laughter of little children; opening for him unsuspected gateways; admitting him to a companionship in which days and nights of service, so arduous and so continuous as to be incredible within the scheme of purely mundane things, were joyously lived in the consciousness of strength granted without stint, mysterious but tangibly real. In those moments he came, unaware, to the brink of a spiritual precipice. So nearly did he miss it all: so nearly, hesitating too, have some of us come to grasping the enabling Hand which, just for a golden moment, has been stretched out to us in pity for "the dullness of our blinded sight."

But impulse prevailed, and went with him (in an old suit) back to Westminster. It guided him in the maze-like hinterland of Victoria Street; it counselled him, if he would really find the spot where need was great and urgent, to keep a bright look out for the scarlet and blue of the Salvation Army. All sorts of memories were awake within him now, memories of many years ago which would have amazed his colleagues; but they are part of another story. Sufficient here to say that he came to the place where a man's work was to be done—and that he found women doing it.

He did not find it without embarrassment. The two men Salvationists who were distributing milk and bread from a cart were clearly indisposed to welcome the assistance of outsiders and, being accustomed to speaking blunt truths bluntly, said as much, whereupon Impulse had a sharp, if short, tussle with its earlier opponents, both of whom were shouting: "I told you so." And even the happy-faced little woman whom he discovered around the corner, issuing orders (written in pencil on brown paper) from a base of operations on the kerbstone, was not apparently oppressed by a sense of his indispensability to her.

There was something about this woman which told him at

once that he was in the presence of a type new to him. The same frank and healthy gladness of countenance he had seen many times before—it is, in a peculiar degree, characteristic of the women of the Salvation Army: but her general bearing and her obvious command alike of herself and of the situation in evolution around her bespoke an efficiency which hitherto he had not associated with them. Her uniform was the ordinary simple and serviceable affair, well-tailored, with the blue insignia of a major on the collar; but in place of the familiar bonnet she wore a hat of mushroom shape; and presently he noticed that all the officers who from time to time appeared and took instructions from her wore the same distinctive head-covering. For all of them, without exception, were women, alert and business-like, and for the most part quite young.

Because efficiency is in danger of sagging badly when reduced to brown paper and a pencil stub for the promulgation of its edicts, and at least equally because it was clear that here was his opportunity, the night editor produced from his pocket a brand new note-book and pencil and placed them at her disposal. She, good soul, sighed patiently and took him, in her gratitude, down into the crowded basement of a house where the flood waters had gone mad and had thrown a heavy mangle through two solid brick walls into a yard. It was the show place of the day, and the owner of the mangle, with a bewildered pride in its performance, was shaking up coins in a cigar box. He added his sixpence to the collection and emerged with no little relief into an atmosphere relatively free from the reek of sewage.

The major glanced at her watch and looked at him hopefully. But he persisted that he had come to help, and he begged her to take him at his word and find him a job. It was then that she saw deliverance approaching.

The Army's wheeled transport was coming into action. A horse and van, both of advanced age, and driven by a wiry woman in civilian clothing of similarly long service, had come to a standstill at the bottom of the street, after a breathless cross-country journey from somewhere in Hoxton; and out of the van a girl lieutenant had dragged just such a sack as might be used, in time of dire extremity, by a rag-and-bone dealer not too sensitive to the world's criticism. It bulged and was manifestly a burden.

"I wonder," said the major, in a voice small but ever-so-distinct, "if you would help the lieutenant carry that sack into

the next street. There are some boots and things in it that will be very useful to these poor people."

If the night editor winced he kept it to himself, for a twinkle in the major's eye had put him on his mettle. He grabbed one end of the grimy sack and ran the gauntlet of the crowd with the lieutenant at the other. They left the boots and things in the care of another officer, and as they retraced their steps the lieutenant, answering his questions, enlightened him briefly concerning herself and her companions, by whom, as it seemed, almost the entire weight of immediate assistance for the flood victims was being cheerfully and sufficiently shouldered.

"We're Slums," she said, laconically. And he learned that all these mushroom-hatted women were officers of the Slum Department, who not only worked in the slums, but actually lived in the slums, two or three to a post, unprotected save by their absolute faith and (though the lieutenant did not say it) by the respect and even affection which such lives as theirs will engender in the hearts of the roughest and most degraded.

From Southwark they had come, from Lambeth and Bermondsey and Bethnal Green and Hoxton, summoned by telephone and telegraph from the nerve centre of an organisation whose staff work is not the least astonishing of its many astonishing features. To some the call had come as they returned from a night of vigil at the bedsides of the sick: to others while already they were busied with the duties brought incessantly by each returning day. Yet here they were, fresh and eager and radiant; running without weariness, unrested, trudging and re-trudging the slimy streets with their miscellaneous packages, boots and blankets, clothing and food-stuffs, unfainting though unfed.

The lieutenant reported to the major for the next duty, and the night editor reported with her. Five minutes later he was walking unsteadily behind a double armful of blankets which made it necessary for him to steer his course by dead reckoning, foolishly pleased that he had passed the major's test: and thereafter things happened so rapidly, and in such strange variety, that he was never able to keep an orderly recollection of them.

He was lent to a succession of officers, speaking all manner of dialects, and one of them welcomed him in a rich accent that spoke to him of his own West Country, and swept him, for a moment that seemed to be filled with tears, away from the drizzle and the mist of Thames-side to the sun-drenched

apple orchards of Somerset. He was put in temporary charge of a depôt of extremely second-hand clothing, dumped, in defiance of all the bye-laws of Westminster, on the pavement at a lamp-illuminated street corner; and in this *rôle* he found himself thrown most surprisingly on the defensive against a gentleman, grievously afflicted with hiccups, and with a certain confusion of sight and speech, who intimated that, as a Salvationist himself, he considered the action of the Salvation Army in conducting an auction sale on the public footpath to be nothing short of a scandal.

The depôt was suddenly depleted by a rush of requisitions, and it became urgently necessary to make the shortage good, for which reason he departed in a taxi-cab and, guided by two of his girl comrades—for they had accepted him unquestioningly by now—bore down on the back streets of the Elephant and Castle. Here, at an unimpressive destination vaguely denominated "the Settlement," he descended into a cellar which looked as if it might have been stocked by the Forty Thieves after a particularly successful *coup* in Petticoat Lane. (Had he but known it, it was the major's own treasure house.) He stuffed all manner of apparel into sacks, loaded the taxi-cab inside and out, and recrossed Westminster Bridge in triumph, with the police clearing a passage for his disreputable-looking turn-out as they neared the barricaded zone and were recognised.

He became a wholesale distributor, a buyer and assistant consumer of buns and pies of doubtful pedigree (for the Army had remembered everything except its own commissariat), a co-opted partner in every kind of Good Samaritanism. And he was happier far than he had been for many months; aware, too, of a curious new vitality within himself, such as appeared to uphold these remarkable women who, while they laughingly munched his buns in the chilly street and pronounced them good, after hours of stress, unrelieved by so much as a cup of tea, disclaimed fatigue and talked quite calmly of carrying on throughout the ensuing night.

Two incidents stood out vividly in his memory when at length that memorable day was over. One was a sudden stir in the crowd near his jumble depôt, caused by the arrival of a noisy motor-van. It was what the Salvation Army knows aptly as a "battery," in other words, a vehicle which can be employed alike as an engine of spiritual "bombardment" in mission work on the countryside, and for the rapid bringing up of material supplies. Out of it stepped a brisk, smiling

woman in a braided tunic, who whisked the major away with her, gave orders and received reports simultaneously for a few feverish seconds, and then was gone again. The officers around him spoke of her in terms bordering on the idolatrous, and he silenced the resentment which the abduction of the major had aroused in him. It was "the Colonel," they told him, and he accepted that as all-sufficing. Rightly so, for as he later came to realise, "the Colonel," the woman head of this all-women Slum Department, had set the entire machinery of relief in motion from her tiny office at headquarters as soon as she had read his special edition.

The second was the appearance of "Dad." "Dad" is a generic name, applied by slum officers to every male person over the age of sixty, irrespective of the qualification of fatherhood. Until he saw "Dad's" better half, the night editor appraised him as the dirtiest human being upon whom he had ever set eyes. The flood, which had trapped him and his wife in the wreckage of their basement room, and had come within a foot of drowning them both, had merely deposited an additional layer of soil upon his wrinkled surface, but at least had done him one good turn, in that it had rendered the further tenancy of his only clothes out of the question. A captain brought him, wrapped in a blanket, and gave him to the night editor to mind while she went in quest of his spouse.

Because "Dad" was cold, and hungry, and very, very frightened, the other girls clustered round him, speaking words of comfort and quaint good cheer. It seemed that, with the loss of what had been their home, he was mortally afraid of being parted from "Mother"; and search was made, from street to street, for a roof beneath which the two might find a common shelter. "Mother" arrived while this problem was still unsolved, an ancient of appalling filthiness, but, for the captain to whose strong arm she clung, just a poor, tired old body in desperate need of rest and kindness. And they all waited in the lamplight for the return of the seekers of lodging.

Bad news. "Dad" could go to the Men's Shelter in Great Peter Street, and "Mother" could be found a bed elsewhere. But for the pair of them, together, room was nowhere to be found.

Then it was that the captain from Somerset said something which the night editor never forgot. "Poor old dears," she protested. "I'm not going to have them separated. Let

them go to the Settlement. 'Leff' and I are here for the night in any case, and they can have our beds."

In that instant the captain, without his knowledge or her own, converted a friend into an ally. Months passed before the comradeship of that Saturday evening was renewed, but they were months in which the influence of half a dozen spoken words was constantly and increasingly with him. *"And they can have our beds."* He looked from the captain and her "leff," clear-skinned and neat in spite of all their labours, to "Mother" and "Dad," whose exceeding unwholesomeness obtruded itself upon his every perception, and, as he looked, the eyes of his understanding were opened, so that about him, plain to the vision on the sodden pavements of the Westminster slums, he saw the footprints of the Divine.

And so it became his mission to escort "Mother" and "Dad" to the Settlement. It was a hilarious journey, for neither had ever ridden in a motor-car before, and both required, in intensive measure, the moral and physical support of as many slum officers as a groaning taxi-cab would hold. At the Settlement doorway he took leave of them all; of "Mother" and "Dad," who three days later passed that doorway once again to end their days in the fragrance of an Eventide Home in the country, and of captains and lieutenants who gave him their gentle "God bless you" as they bade him good-night. He was at London Bridge station before he remembered that to none of them had he disclosed his name or calling; from none of them learned more than was contained in that simple intimation: "We're Slums."

* * * * * *

Even the taxi-driver was under the spell. "No charge for the extra passengers, guv'nor," he said, gruffly. "That's all right. Been your busy day, ain't it?"

SLUMS, and more especially Slum Clearance, have to-day attained first magnitude as a political issue, but there are few subjects more imperfectly apprehended by the great body of the public. By many, perhaps, indeed, by the majority, the problem is vaguely seen as one for parliamentary and municipal legislation on a frankly Herculean scale, the bold

diversion of financial rivers into the stalls of Augeas, and the resultant cleansing, immediate and final, of what are lightly dismissed, if often rightly denounced, as plague spots. For others, the slums represent a particular and well-defined class of people, a sort of untouchable caste, whose main occupations are the breeding of children and disease, and the dissipation, in public-house and picture-palace, of a substance derived exclusively from crime, the poor rates, and the dole. By yet a foolish few the slums are viewed as the habitation of Romance —romance of that strangely perverted type which has evolved during the last two decades, and which exalts, among others, the bully, the "thick-eared" hero and the Satanic Oriental. For the existence of this last-mentioned pestilential minority the fiction writer of the "Limehouse" school is mainly responsible. It might be to the good of his soul were he in a position to hear the opinions of Limehouse on the charabancs which his inventions have filled with nocturnal trippers, morbidly eager to touch the hem of its supposedly evil garments—or for that matter, to hear what is said at the close of these perambulations by the sorely disillusioned pilgrims themselves.

The truth, of course, is that all these delineations of the slums and the slum problem are out of drawing: they are false both in perspective and in colour. Urgent though it undoubtedly is, re-housing is not the most urgent of the issues affecting the dwellers in slumdom; crime and depravity and sickness may be rampant in their midst, but quixotic unselfishness, threadbare cleanliness and honesty, and, above all, a wonder-compelling humour are there to neighbour them. Romance there is, too, as there must always be where life is lived in perpetual engagement with the surge of crowds and the urge of a desperate self-preservation. But the true romance of Tabard Street does not lie in its link with Chaucer; the romance of Abbey Street has no concern with Bermondsey's monastic greatness of five hundred years ago; the romance of Shadwell and Limehouse and Custom House has little in it of the river's salted tang.

The real romance of these places, and of their counterparts in the cities of the provinces, is something of instant importance. It may sound wildly paradoxical to those who have no first-hand knowledge, but there is something taking place in the slums, something slowly gathering force in the slums, which contains within itself the solvent, not only of the slum problem, but of the world's problem—the problem of life and

labour, brotherhood and equal opportunity. It is taking place elsewhere, but less patently. Elsewhere the evidence is largely hidden and the growth impeded by a tangle of formalism, convention, dispute, and disbelief. The power which is doing strange and arresting things in the slums to-day is something which needs for its full manifestation primitive conditions and the simple acceptances which a middle-class environment and upbringing scarcely favour, but which the extremities of poverty, unemployment and homelessness (the overcrowded are "homeless" in the worst sense) are exactly calculated to bring into play.

Time and again this never dormant power has startlingly declared itself, and the world, for a while, has allowed its attention to be captured. Twenty years ago a journalist* roused the five continents with a faithful description of what it had achieved in a single district of London—that unlooked-for slum district, in many respects happily unique, which lies immediately east of Shepherd's Bush. Forty-five years earlier, with the genius of William Booth as its instrument, the same superhuman influence asserted itself in Whitechapel with all the resistless might of a great natural upheaval. And so it has been, periodically and as if in a long and patient succession of bids for mankind's understanding of its promise, ever since the morning when the first of the disciples, dreaming by Jordan of Jewry's Deliverer, accepted the Master's invitation to come and see for themselves the simple places of His abiding. Flickering and falling, leaping and blazing up anew, the fire of it has never been extinguished, never fully taken hold. Not too faithfully has it been tended. But now, in the gloom of a human society baffled by the residual enigmas of a world-war, it is rising anew and beacon-like in the midst of those who, with hope relinquished in the help of man, are ripe for the experiment of taking God at His word.

It is increasingly clear to-day that, even among those who are most articulate in their profession of religious scepticism, there are thousands who are pathetically anxious to believe. The post-bag of every newspaper in the country bears witness to this truth; its commercialisation by the so-called "popular" press, in the form of regular religious features and spasmodic religious stunts, is significant evidence in support of it. These are the men and women, the girls and youths, who, could they but grasp the torch of faith, or kindle anew that which seems to be dying in their feeble hold, might set the

*Harold Begbie: "Broken Earthenware."

world alight with a re-discovered hope. It is the single purpose of these chapters to point a way to the renewing flame. They are written, not by the professor of any denominational creed, but by one the first rule of whose calling is to question all news, regardless of source, and ruthlessly to omit the doubtful. Applying this rule, page by page, sentence by sentence, to the claims they embody and the testimony they contain, he throws them out as a considered challenge, believing they will carry conviction that the wonder-working presence of a real and loving God is to be found "not far from every one of us," but, beyond all question, in the slums.

But what are the slums? And where? The fact is that they can neither be mapped nor defined in standard terms. Their characteristics vary enormously, not only in different parts of the country, but in different parts of the same city. Thus, as anyone who has had experience of them will concede, there is a marked difference between the slums of Southwark and the slums of Sunderland, but a difference even more marked as between Southwark and Notting Dale. There are slum districts in which one is chiefly conscious of passive distress, and others in which the atmosphere seems actively malignant. There are slums where all the social senses appear to be dulled; whence all feeling of degradation appears to have long departed: there are terrible streets and dens in which there is a fierce and callous pride, astonishing to encounter and difficult beyond conception to overcome. And there are slums in the most surprising places.

Big houses once tenanted by the moneyed, but now too expensive to maintain and too difficult to run owing to the shortage of servants, have come into the ownership of small people. Often the profits of war-time trade have been invested in the purchase of them, at figures, of course, greatly diminished by reason of the slump in this class of property. It is not uncommon to find the new owners and their families living in one or two basement rooms and farming out the whole of the remaining accommodation at rents of as much as a guinea per room, per week. Whole families may live in these single rooms, paying the price because they have no alternative. There is a wash-stand, or a table, or a decrepit arm-chair in the room: therefore, says the law, it is a "furnished" apartment. There are more children than the sanitary inspector would permit to occupy a single room—if he were told —therefore, since there is no other accommodation to be had, it is necessary to consider the value of a landlady's complaisance.

It is sad to have to employ the feminine gender in relation to ghoulishness such as this, but the utter hardness of heart which so exploits the calamities of others seems to exist far less frequently in men. There are landlords by the score upon whom must be laid a terrible responsibility—the responsibility for innocence defiled, intellect depraved, body and soul destroyed in the satisfaction of the house-farmer's unscrupulous greed; but, as a general rule, they sit at the receipt of custom, not in the back kitchens of their grossly over-populated tenements, but in respectable houses of the suburbs, drawing their rents, through agents devoid of conscience, in comfortable carelessness of the use to which their property is put.

After this fashion slum conditions may be set up far outside the confines of the slums ordinarily so described. The human body, when the system is run down, falls the more readily a prey to the germs of disease: it is the same with a residential district; when it is on the down grade by reason of economic influences or the common phenomena of migration, it is only too easily infected with the fever of slumdom. Proof of it is discoverable in a dozen parts of London, miles removed from the streets of huddled, decaying dwellings which figure in the reports of housing committees and the like.

If it comes as a shock to the ordinary man to find dirt and despair and a vicious, criminal overcrowding behind the smug front of a suburban villa, it may startle him quite as much to scan the list of places whence the material for succeeding chapters has been drawn. London, Manchester, and Birmingham; Bristol, Glasgow and Newcastle; slums, one supposes, must be taken for granted in the swarming centres of labour and the lack of it. But Cheltenham the elegant, and Bath of Beau Nash, to say nothing of Brighton and beautiful Inverness, surely their airs alone, God-given and self-given, must warrant them immune from all such taint. Yet listen to this, transcribed, without the alteration or insertion of a word, from a Bath note-book:

> Old lady, within shadow of Abbey, in a cellar kitchen. Dying. No gas—candle in a jar. Rats running all over the room. Old lady whispered she killed one on her bed Tuesday. . . .

And this, from the record of a Sunday morning visit in Cheltenham:

she was soaking some hard crusts in a bowl, with the intention of making a bread pudding for her family of six little children. The husband, a consumptive, is unable to work; the only income £1 a week from the Guardians. The rent is 12s. a week: the remaining 8s. is all they have to exist on. Two hours later another baby was born, making the seventh. Her greatest worry was not for herself, but to know who was going to feed her little ones while she was in bed.

There will be more to tell later concerning that old lady in the cellar kitchen, "within the shadow of the Abbey." But for the moment the particular, with one further illustration, may be left for the general. Each of the tragedies just outlined is typical; yet in the one vast tragedy of the slums no single incident can rightly be considered typical in a greater degree than a single splash of the scene-painter's brush is typical of the scene as a whole. The multitude of daubs, too, may combine in a general effect sombre almost beyond bearing or belief, but the concentrated beam of the spot-light will reveal many a touch of brightness and many a beautiful hue. Here, for instance, is a story which has its setting in an East End slum, yet is as fragrant as a field of lavender and carries within it, maybe, a closer likeness of the Christ than that picture of Him with which it is concerned:

The picture hangs above the fire-place of a little, clean-swept room in which an aged couple live, happy in spite of extreme poverty. With loving vehemence, the old lady proclaims it "the best thing in the house."

She saw it first in a pawn-shop, and it made her sick with shame to think that anyone should have lodged it in such an habitation. She had no money with which to rescue it: she and her husband were both hungry. But "she could not see her Lord in pawn," and for His sake Who "did much more for her" she undertook a pilgrimage and begged a shilling from a married daughter.

She hurried back to the pawn-shop, only to find that the price of the picture was eighteenpence. The tears of disappointment stood in her tired old eyes, and she begged the pawnbroker to let her take the treasure with her, promising that she would pay the balance as soon as she possibly could.

The man was surprised, and touched. "Do you really want it as badly as that?" he said. "Give me your shilling, then, and you shall have it."

So with the price of food forgone, a loving heart redeemed her Redeemer.

"Lord, when saw we Thee in prison and did not minister unto Thee?"

By the simplicity of such as these are the high lights provided; by the daily denials of self on the part of others who always know of cases more deserving than their own; by the promise, two-edged though it be, which the wonderfully quick wit of the slum child constantly holds out.

Nevertheless, the general impression left by a slum survey is one of darkness, depression, and despair. In areas where housing conditions are at their worst, as for example in Hoxton and the poorest parts of Sunderland and Edinburgh, the dirt, the noise, the dampness and staleness, the lack of sanitation and the complete absence of privacy are fused in a nightmare offensive to every sense. The deadly apathy which is often spoken of as the "slum mind" is in part the result and in part the occasion of it.

Men are slack, brutalised, or despondent; women unsexed and degraded by drink, by vice, by cruelty suffered and by cruelty inflicted. In women and men alike ambition is seemingly dead; and although many of them have known better circumstances, and have fallen from them through no mortal faults of their own, they are so broken in spirit that, failing continual encouragement, they cease to struggle for the barest decencies of life. Beat, starve, and neglect a dog or a cat, and it will at least attempt to keep itself clean. The human animal, on the other hand, allows itself, once a certain border-line has been passed, to sink to unspeakable depths of vileness and abandonment. It is an open question whether the bigger problem is presented by these creatures of the abyss or by the slum-born, to whom the ordinary criteria of life are literally unknown; but it is beyond question that, in the mass, the populations of the slums constitute a grave and growing danger. They are a definite, insistent challenge to the politician, the hygienist, and, above all, the Christian. They are hot-beds of discontent—how could it be otherwise?—and they furnish the anti-social agitator with much of his most promising material. Tempers are reddening to-day from a black sullenness to an active anger; a generation has come to manhood and parenthood which has never known employment; souls are being strangled by a cretinous debasement of every moral standard. Catastrophe is not far distant: unless Christianity takes up the gauntlet it is inevitable.

The slum posts of the Salvation Army, viewed from this angle, are stabilising influences of the first importance to the community. If the statement sounds surprising it can, at any rate, be readily put to the test, for the work which the slum posts do is at all times open for the world's inspection. The pity of it is that the world, even the religious world, is so little interested: it may be doubted whether the Salvation Army itself fully realises either the burden or the glory of the battle which its devoted slum officers are waging.

For these reasons the story needs to be told; but also because it holds for Everyman a message of splendid cheer, an affirmation of God's unchanged reality and power. And, after all, what more likely place in which to find Him than where He is needed most?—comforting the lonely and the sick, feeding the hungry, strengthening the hands that hang down, passing unseen across a shabby threshold into a shabbier out-of-doors which yet, for Him, has this in common with the new Jerusalem, that it is "full of boys and girls, playing in the streets thereof."

GOD IN THE SLUMS CHAP. III

'Not in temples made with hands." The words come unbidden to the mind, and are more than likely to bring with them a smile, when one considers the purely structural and architectural features of the Salvation Army's slum posts. The little centres of a great work are certainly unpretentious. Distinguished, as a rule, by the tenancy of corner sites in the roughest neighbourhoods, and by a certain air of being on the defensive against the social storms which beat upon positions so exposed, they are apt, externally, to wear a trifle badly. Green paint is serviceable, but soon looks stale; and windows which have to be boarded and wired to protect them from the exuberance of the populace can scarcely make the bravest showing. The same may be said of doors rendered kick-proof by the armour-plating of their lower panels, perhaps knock-proof as well by the amputation of their knockers, an operation performed as often by the beleaguered as by the beleaguerers.

The observant eye will note that the upper windows—less liable to be used, in times of clamour, as targets for missiles whose variety ranges from mere mud to stewed eels—are clean

and brightly curtained: but competing, and not unsuccessfully, with the public-house and the picture-palace, the post starts always and everywhere from scratch, heavily handicapped by the allurements with which its rivals face the dingiest streets. It is a point worth remembering, especially in relation to the fact that its accommodation is generally taxed to the utmost by the crowds of women who flock to the week-day afternoon gatherings of the "Home League"—the Salvation Army equivalent of the Mother's Meeting.

Unpretentiousness of outward appearance, however, is wholly in keeping with a strategy which holds that, social and religious, the problem of the slums can effectively be grappled with only from the inside, and which disposes its forces accordingly. The Communist, with his disciplined "cell," mingling with the workers in the heart of the factory; the Salvationist, detailing picked officers to live and labour just where slum conditions are at their most difficult; both are acting on the age-old principle that "a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump." In both cases it is the presence of a ferment that is recognised as essential, not the application of surface treatment; and no Salvation Army slum post could do its work—work which, without disparagement to the activities of other bodies, may fairly be described as unique—either from the pedestal of patronage or without the sympathy bred by a personal twenty-four-hours-a-day experience of slum life.

With exceptions so rare as to be negligible, therefore, the slum officers live on the premises. And because a slum post, in the nature of things, cannot be self-supporting, the premises must be cheap to acquire and maintain, and must be adaptable to the purposes not of living-quarters alone, but of a meeting-hall, soup-kitchen, clinic, general consulting-room and enquiry-bureau, and emergency shelter. It says something for the resourcefulness of those concerned that these varied desiderata are occasionally combined within the cramped limits of a single small dwelling-house of the ordinary slum street type. By way of contrast, one or two posts, obtained in special circumstances, are relatively roomy and impressive. There is one, for instance, which in days gone by was a boxing saloon; another which once housed the welfare organisation of a famous woman suffragist. Yet another, in Edinburgh, was formerly a place of Masonic assembly, and is reputed to have witnessed the initiation of Sir Walter Scott and other famous men. But if, in attempting the external description of a slum post, one were to take the bulk of them and seek a common

denominator, the most appropriate term would be "a derelict pub."

There should be nothing here to shock the thoughtful, for that is exactly what most of the slum posts are. The public-house which fails to obtain a renewal of licence is the place, above all others, for which the Slum Department of the Salvation Army enquires when meditating a new offensive. Its position is sure to be good (the brewer knows his business), the accommodation is likely to be ample (in particular, the bar usually makes an excellent hall, and the counter, turned upon its side, will often provide all that is necessary in the way of a platform), while the converted pub, to quite a number of people, is as definite an attraction as a converted drunkard. To some also as definite a shock, witness the story of a woman who, in ignorance of one such conversion, came to the side door in the twilight with a jug in her hand and, when her knock was answered by an officer in uniform, could only open her mouth in dismay and gasp "Oh Lor! it's the Army!"

Fully to know the gratefulness of soul which can be awakened by such simple solaces as flowers, bright wallpaper and a general spotlessness, one needs to come within doors at a slum post after a round of visits "on the district." The walls, the floors, the very air of the place are happy, and eloquent with the practice of the presence of God. That is a phrase borrowed from the monastic writers, yet anything less suggestive of the monastic life could hardly be imagined. The lieutenant is singing in the kitchen, the helper is singing in the hall (with a scrubbing-brush obligato), the captain is singing to herself—with occasional pauses for hard thought—as she checks her entries in the various books she must keep, the visiting-list, the thrift accounts, the membership roll, and so forth.

One remembers that these three women, in the majority of cases, form the garrison, reduced at night to two, since the helper is a non-resident. As likely as not, the captain has been out at a bedside vigil for half the hours of darkness, perhaps the lieutenant as well, if it be the sick season of the year. They have provided hot breakfast for some scores of children, they have discharged the trivial round of cleaning and dusting in a household which, because of its surroundings and its ever-open door, calls for more cleaning and dusting in a day than many a less modest establishment gets in a week; they have skilfully dressed the wounds and sore places of a number of out-patients; they have in some wonderful way combined the preparation of a midday meal for themselves and

soup or boiled rice for the children with the visitation of a dozen or more of their people. At least one of these visits may have involved the "cleaning-up" of some repellent case of neglect. Of this aspect of the slum officer's work more will presently be said, but it should be noted in a cursory survey of the day's doings that officers have been known to return to their quarters after a cleaning-up reeling as they walked from the gassing to which they have been subjected in hutchlike rooms polluted by unnameable filth.

Upon their dinner-table they will ask a benediction with the fresh faith of children:

> On us and these
> Thy blessing, please,
> For Jesus' sake. Amen.

And over it they will linger just long enough for the reading of a Scripture portion and maybe the taking of a promise—the random selection of a text printed upon a tiny roll of paper from a box packed tight with hundreds of them. The afternoon will be taken up with further visitations, or with the holding of a Home League meeting, involving not only the preparation of some sort of address, but the provision of tea and biscuits for anything from fifty to one hundred women, with or without babies. Tea for the garrison may thereby be delayed, but time is remorseless and before an evening meeting there may be needlework to do, reports to draft, first-aid and nursing lessons to study, and over, above, and through all a steady succession of callers to comfort, succour, and advise. Intervention in a street brawl may provide a diversion between the close of the evening meeting and bed-time; and if, as sometimes occurs, such intervention, to be completely effective, requires the sobering of the principal combatants by means of the homely, but drastic, remedies which the captain has always on hand (strong coffee, with an admixture of washing soda, is much favoured), the officers' supper may well go unconsumed. And so to bed.

One thinks of these girls, many of them barely out of their 'teens, sleeping the sleep that is born of a happy weariness, alone and unafraid in their little houses, save for a dog or a cat to keep the rats in their holes, yet surrounded by all that is wicked, criminal, and unclean. Murder itself may stalk outside their doors; burglary at times—but very rarely—may come with stealth across their window-sills; vice at all hours

is awake in every crowded lodging-room beyond their thin partitioning walls. Add the continual horror of vermin, against which every slum post has to strive without ceasing. Hear one officer tell how, while the long-needed work of house demolition was in progress around her island post, every window had to be kept tight closed despite the heat, and every door defended, because of the retreating armies of

> Things creeping innumerable,
> Both small and great beasts,

which stormed the ledges and swarmed in every crevice that seemed to offer a path to sanctuary.

Think of all this, and then ask what it is that brings to such a life much more than a mere endurance, a positive joy. From the walls of the sitting-room—and it is a fairly safe speculation, by the way, that these and all the other walls have been papered, and the ceilings whitewashed, by the officers themselves—a poker-worked slogan or hand-painted motto scroll challenges the attention and the humour of the visitor. Says one of them:

> You can't clean up the world with soft soap.
> It needs grit.

That much is apparent already. But grit will not run a slum post. Nor, let it be observed, will emotion. There are estimable and reasonably intelligent people in surprising numbers who declare, and presumably believe, that emotion is the Salvation Army's principal stock-in-trade. The slum post is the answer to them—complete and devastating. It is just possible that a great wave of emotion, a fervid quasi-conversion, might sweep a girl into officership at a slum post: it is altogether inconceivable that it should sustain her there for a single day. One is nearer the secret in the portraits which abound on every hand, for these are the tokens of a wonderful comradeship which none can rightly understand unless qualified by a kinship of consecration and sacrifice. But comradeship is not the hidden power, either. It is contained in one word, of infinite interpretation, just "God."

Talk with a slum officer for five minutes and you will find that she speaks of God as one having direct knowledge and direct access. She is satisfied that she lives under His very real protection, for which reason she is not afraid, in case of

need, to penetrate, alone and by night, into streets which police constables traverse only in twos and threes, to sit by the couch of a small-pox patient, to change the dressings of the victim of one of sin's loathsome diseases. She believes, indeed she knows from repeated experience, that in times of emergency she will be endowed with superhuman faculties of endurance, and it does not surprise her, because the words of Isaiah convey for her a binding promise, to be taken in the most literal sense, that "they who wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength." Isaiah is one of her store-houses of strength. When she is tempted to be cast down over the apparent failure of some effort in which she has spent herself unsparingly, she is cheered by the assurance that the word of God "shall not return void"; and time and again, after many days, she is justified in her faith by the discovery that her labours have borne fruit in manners and places undreamed of. Battling against depravities of mind and deficiencies of intellect for the souls of those whose worst foes are commonly in their own households, she believes, nay, once again, she knows, that the way of holiness lies as widely open to the slum dweller as to the sheltered saint, that the flaming sword of God will suffice to keep it free from lions, and that wayfaring men, though fools, need not err in it.

She is no fanatic: the God in whom she puts this absolute trust, to whom and of whom she speaks with a frankness and a familiarity oftentimes a little discomposing to those unused to it, is a God who expects His children to be tolerant and patient, to be mindful of the ordinary rules of hygiene (not forgetting that a healthy appetite is something to be grateful for), to share and to develop the gift of laughter, and at all times to employ the common sense with which He has equipped them. It is not only that she puts God first in her life: God fills her life. Her work, hard though it may press in upon each minute of her waking time, is never in competition with God for the possession of her mind, because it is itself a prayer.

And now let the obvious question be answered ere it can be asked. These are the typical qualities of the slum officer: you will meet them, and instantly recognise them, wherever there is a post, notwithstanding the contrasts of local conditions and despite every difference in birth, education, and upbringing. The women and girls who represent the Salvation Army in the slums are not a selected strain: on the contrary, they are drawn from all ranks of society, and their experiences and natural gifts are in many ways widely dissimilar. Some of

them have come out of extreme poverty, and so are fitted for their task by the possession of first-hand knowledge. Others have come from comparative ease and in coming have had to meet the opposition of relatives and friends resentful of what has seemed to them the blind relinquishment of life's best chances. A majority—and this is surely by a strangely beautiful dispensation—have been bred in peaceful country homes. It is as if the Great Gardener grew them in His fairest acres, and sent them to gladden sunless lives with the colour and peace of farm gardens and water-meadows, and the clean sweetness of a wind across the cornfields.

They are in the slums, not of their own choosing or by their own efforts. Some, as will be seen, have felt themselves called thither. Some again, offering for service in the Salvation Army without condition—as all such offers must be made—have been astonished at receiving slum appointments. What matters most is that, once in the slums, few wish themselves elsewhere, and many, even among the astonished ones, discover with a new wonder that, all unknown to them, their previous occupations have been an essential part of their preparation for the work.

That preparation, indeed, is something which no course of training, however intensive, could by itself supply. Consider what is expected of a slum officer, and remember that she is commissioned at an average age of twenty-two, after only nine months of cadetship in the "training garrison."

She is expected, as a Salvationist, to be able to conduct meetings, whether indoors or in the uproar of a swarming street. This presupposes an ability to sing (generally without accompaniment and above all kinds of noise) and to deliver a simple address—the slum folk will not listen to any other. She must be able to teach undisciplined children many things.

She must be able to assume the leadership and control of those who need it, and to act as friend, general counsellor, and peace-maker. And she must know how to stop a fight wisely.

She must qualify in first-aid and home nursing. She cannot become a captain, or be given charge of a post, until she has won the medallion of the St. John Ambulance Association.

She must be able to run a soup-kitchen and organise emergency relief measures. She must understand the economic feeding of a family, and be able to undertake invalid cookery, often under difficulty. Ordinary cooking, sewing, and washing are taken for granted.

She must know something of midwifery and everything about the care of babies and children generally.

She must have at least a working knowledge of the law as it affects the daily life of the people, particularly in relation to poor relief, housing, and pensions for the aged, the blind, the widow, and the ex-service man. And she must at all times be tactful and even-tempered, able to do business with business men, or present a case to officialdom, on behalf of those who without her aid would be helpless and inarticulate.

The worldly-wise will search in vain for any "material inducements" to set against demands so exacting and continuous. The slum officer is provided with her living-quarters and their furnishings. Everything else she must find for herself out of a salary which, if she be a lieutenant, may compare with that of a cook or house-parlourmaid and, if she be a captain, is perhaps a third or a half of what she might much more comfortably earn as a shorthand-typist. She must pay for her food and her housekeeping requisites, for indoor and outdoor uniform (it is exceedingly serviceable but it is by no means cheap), for her annual three weeks' holiday and for the doctor's advice, should she need it. And insurance, collection money, and various special calls, as in the seasons of Self-Denial and Harvest, will make further inroads upon her resources.

Could any power, short of the supernatural, seek out, from among the multitude, those whose fitness for service may be discernible to no human eye, change their whole nature and outlook on life, cause them to accept, not with resignation but with enthusiasm, the conditions which have here been summarised, give them strange new qualities of body, mind and spirit, and make them the agents of astounding transformations in the lives of others?

A newspaper-reading world, which discusses with such queer detachment the decline of church-going, the supposed failure of youth to realise its need of God, the very question whether God exists, may fail to grasp the significance of this thing, may well be ignorant of its happening.

Yet such things happened, and happened repeatedly in the world of nineteen hundred years ago. They happen to-day in obedience to the same unchanging and unchangeable law: and they are no more restricted to a particular class, caste or sect than they were when John the Apostle was preaching the gospel of the Whosoever. And this, in the deliberate opinion of one who has seen and proved them for himself, is the truest

and most urgent news which any newspaper of these latter days could publish to mankind.

GOD IN THE SLUMS CHAP. IV

DIVE beneath the roaring streets of London at the Bank and come to the top again five minutes later at Old Street. So quickly may the gulf be bridged which separates the Hub of the Universe from Hoxton.

From the gateway of the Old Street tube station the immensity of the gulf will not at once be obvious. But a walk of only a few hundred yards will bring you to the doorway of the Hoxton slum post. And from the Bank of England and the Stock Exchange to the doorway of the Hoxton slum post—meaning the wrong side of that same—is about as far as the imagination of man can travel.

The streets hereabouts are narrow and dank and nasty with the nastiness of a dirty old age. Across roadways and pavements littered with barrows and boxes and swarming with unwashed children, the crowded dwellings scowl at each other, keep each other under surveillance, bandy gross jests and frank obscenities. The open windows of the slum post are a benefit to lungs rather than to ears, and a questionable benefit at that. The very wind is lazy in Hoxton. And somebody in the neighbourhood actually keeps cows . . . !

Not long ago the officer in charge of the post had occasion to pay a first visit to a cellar kitchen in the near vicinity. It was not a particularly desirable cellar kitchen, for it was the home and undisputed breeding-ground of several families of rats, several tribes of beetles and whole nations of lesser but still more pestiferous fauna. But it was also the home, and the only home, of eight human beings, and it was because of the imminent arrival of a ninth that the officer's presence was in demand.

The woman was desperately ill, but thanks very largely to the officer's skilled assistance her life was saved. The baby was malformed—deformities of body and of mind, ghastly and without number, are bred in the cellar kitchens of the slums—but the officer was able to arrange for prompt hospital treatment by means of which the malformation was corrected. Kindness and love, in a blue uniform and a mushroom hat,

grew familiar with the dark staircase, and the gloom at its foot began to be irradiated with a flickering light—the dawn of a returning humanity.

The slums are places of fantastic contradictions. In many respects they have changed their guise—"art" silk has worked its tawdry wonders with the younger women, just as free boots and meals have done with the children, the chief beneficiaries by these and other forms of organised philanthropy—and so little a thing as a gleam of sunshine or a storm of rain will alter their features while you gaze upon them. Sun and season, for that matter, play strange tricks together. Even a court in Shadwell loses half its sordidness in the sparkle of a May morning when the clean east wind is blowing off the river. A sodden day of December can be kind to it, too, veiling its crudities and simulating comfort from its cramped accommodation. It is under the sultry sun of August that the lanes and alleys reek most horribly to heaven, and the aged and infirm lie sweating on their ragged beds in rooms that are very ovens. The casual visitor, scanning the surface of things, is confused and puzzled. The nakedness of small feet in high summer is not too bad when good shoes seemingly fall from the skies in winter. The bare-legged baby girl playing in the gutter to-day is a sturdier little animal than her counterpart of two generations ago, and surprisingly soon the cheap street-market stalls will furnish her with a sufficiency of silken hosiery and other raiment to prevent her becoming, in externals at any rate, the female hooligan into which she would assuredly once have grown. How easy then to bring away from a chance perambulation of the slums a belief that their foulness and want have been extravagantly over-stated.

It is not so, of course, because there are things too terrible for over-statement. There are the things that lurk in the cellar-kitchens and living-kennels where households herd with the promiscuity of brutes. Were it possible, for instance, to make known the number of little children outraged in their own homes, the yet greater number whose life-springs, minds, and spirits are polluted in their earliest years, all England would ring with execration.

Evil in abundance had found lodgment in that den below ground to which the officer from the Hoxton slum post came daily with food and baby clothes and messages of cheer. Disease was there, and dishonesty, ignorance, an utter lack of principle, and a stranglehold of fear and poverty relentlessly maintained by a woman money-lender. Children with tainted

bodies and tainted instincts; a girl of twelve with that upon her memory which Hell itself would shudder at. Stench and vermin—and a tiny, twisted, unconsidered soul just born into the midst of it all.

Imagine a birth like this, and picture then the painful travail with which the common decencies and aspirations of an almost forgotten human state were brought into being again through the faith of one who dared to speak words of cheer in such surroundings and dared to believe that a pitying God might change them.

It reads in snatches like some uproarious farce, this story of the Browns (that isn't their real name, but it will do). It is never an easy matter to secure a house on one of the new L.C.C. estates, but then there is no more persistent optimist than a slum officer and none more importunate where the interests of her people are concerned. The Browns of Hoxton, all nine of them, moved out of their cellar into a new world. The kaleidoscopic ingenuities of Mr. Brown, ever present as a third party in the negotiations, with an alert but entirely unbalanced imagination to back his claims, came near to preventing the transfer, but it took place at last, on the strength of the slum officer's bond, and mighty was the commotion that attended it. What a cleaning up before departure; what an exclaiming when the new home was reached and the household, for the first time, was called upon to form itself into separate sleeping contingents.

* * * * * *

And now came shadow upon the comedy, cast from an angle of the slum problem which is persistently ignored by the best intentioned of housing authorities. Work was found for the man, who was far from being the spineless ne'er-do-well of slum tradition, and in the possession of it he began to regain his self-respect. But he had reckoned without his neighbours.

It is easy enough to condemn a respectability which withholds its sympathy from struggling poverty next door. But this particular form of snobbishness, after all, is not confined to Council housing estates, nor is it in any way an uglier thing in Becontree than in Balham, in Downham than in Dulwich. It is both natural and right that a decent working-class family should be anxious to preserve itself from contamination: what is so often forgotten is that those who have newly been transported from the slums are, as a rule, lonely, wretched, anxious beyond expression for any warm current of understanding that will temper the coldness of strange conditions—that they

are, in two unlooked-for words, acutely sensitive. The atmosphere of hostility about them is a torture. By contrast, the very indecencies of slumdom's overlapping tenancies inspire in them regretful longing. The long neat avenues of "model" dwellings quickly grow hateful to them, breeding a fierce nostalgia for crowded streets, the lights of a multitude of small shops, the stifling malt-smoke-and-sawdust breath of the public-house bar.

It has been a pet theory of numberless housing committees that the mingling of less advanced families among the more respectable is helpful to the former. Pity it is that the contrary is more often the case.

The Browns made all sorts of poor, ineffective little overtures for friendship. They were not wanted. They had no friend on earth but the slum officer, and she was now a long way off, though not so far that she did not make an occasional journey to see them. Groping for a pathway to the better opinions of his fellows, Mr. Brown gazed about him and found it in his own garden patch. The gardens of his neighbours were bright with flowers: his own was barren and untended. But in a single night, quite literally, all was changed. The head of the Brown *ménage* was absent from home for most of that night, and in the light of morning his front garden was seen to be filled to capacity with cabbages and brussels sprouts, all fully grown and no waiting.

Sad to relate, Mr. Brown's first steps in agriculture were not taken kindly by the local sprout and cabbage fanciers, and representations were made to the estate agent which, but for yet another intervention on the slum officer's part, would have quickly and fittingly ended in his own transplantation. The protest, it has to be added, was one of a series. Scarcely a week passed without some fresh disclosure of obliquity. A much-harassed slum officer found it far easier to smile over Mr. Brown's raid on his neighbours' cabbage patches than over the discovery that one of the children, an infant girl of seven or thereabouts, was already an habitual thief. All the elder children were adept at borrowing money or getting goods without it: none of them had any notion of honest pastime. There was one cold day, moreover, when illness declared itself. The slum officer, inevitably, was sent for. Picture her feelings on finding all the rooms but one vacated, and in that one the whole establishment of nine, sick and sound, living and eating and sleeping together, Hoxton fashion, "because it was warmer."

Faith, hope, and charity, these three, and each of them unstintedly, were necessary in dealing with the Browns; and just when they were triumphing at last fresh trouble came. The man, unused to the heavy strain of road work, broke down in health and simultaneously, with the usual complete absence of provision, an eighth baby arrived.

Yet the miracle has happened. The Browns to-day are "doing well." They have been rescued and made into decent, wage-earning citizens, capable of helping others by example at least, through an obstinate belief that the promises of God are as fully to be relied upon as the laws of nature; that, in fact, they *are* laws of Nature.

It is a belief that cannot be dismissed by any invocation of reason or science, by any taunt of seeming failure, or by any citation of ungranted prayer. The case of the Browns is not an isolated one: it has been paralleled and is being paralleled to-day wherever the same essential methods have been employed. Hard facts testify to it; hard facts like police records, rent-books, scholarships and employers' references. This book is made up of hard facts, and the hardest of them—most concrete yet probably least credited—is that faith and prayer accomplish miracles to-day as they always did.

Every time the band of a certain East End Salvation Army corps turns out for a march, at least four other slum miracles march with it. The sturdy sergeant of the colours is one of them: his three sons playing in the young people's section make up the total. All four were won by simple faith, applied through methods of what Whitehall is wont to describe as "peaceful penetration."

The girl who won them—she is little more than a girl now—gave up a promising business post to volunteer for officership in the Salvation Army and she quickly found herself in the London slums. Found herself in a double sense. She found also these four trophies of hers, with nine more, living in three small rooms; three generations of them, including an uncle. There was Granny, old in the worst ways of slumland, and there was a terror aged six, who openly defied the police and was by them officially listed as "out of control." This boy was a practised thief and was possessed by a devil in the form of a temper which drove him to terrifying excesses. Under the sway of it, one of his specialities was to descend upon a grocer's shop and with great rapidity smash all the eggs displayed outside it.

The captain was strangely drawn to this child. She formed

the habit of calling every evening and holding family prayers. She taught a congregation of thirteen, plus frequent visitors, the vesper hymn that English children have sung the world over:

Lord, keep us safe this night,
Secure from all our fears.
May angels guard us while we sleep,
Till morning light appears.

And gradually the boy was tamed and headed off from a criminal career. It may sound like exaggeration to talk of a criminal career at the age of six; but six in the slums is ten elsewhere, and many a slum child of ten is years old in depravity and petty crime. The egg-smasher promised to be good, and he kept his promise, making private reports weekly at the slum post regarding his spiritual condition. One hardly knows whether to laugh or cry at the thought of the little slum captain, holding assize as a sort of Big Sister Confessor, with Sin, aged six, lisping out its prayers and its promises at her knee. But the egg-smasher plays in the band to-day, and his brothers with him. They march behind their father, and their home is a Salvationist home, with all that that implies in the way of honesty, decency, and modest comfort.

The response of the slum dweller to real religion is a very remarkable and significant thing. As this story shows it can be extremely strong in the case of children, and it is almost equally powerful among the women. If it is less marked among the men, it is surely because they, by comparison, are little catered for. There is a gap in the line here which needs to be filled, and quickly. Results which have attended certain isolated experiments suggest that if a crowd of Christian men were to undertake in the slums what has been well outlined as a "a crusade of determined friendliness" there would be some astonishing happenings. The Salvation Army may or may not be the body which should make trial of it; but why leave it to the Army in any case? Why wait for a lead, while lads and men, increasingly demoralised by unemployment, are neglected by almost everybody except the anti-social agitator? The young men of the Brotherhoods; better still, the men who, in the splendid but little known charitable organisations of big business houses, in Rotary clubs and the like, give form to the promptings of the brotherhood spirit, are here confronting at the same time crisis and opportunity.

Let this chapter close with the story of Mr. Bottle of

Bermondsey, and how he came to buy a Hallelujah bonnet. It is more correctly the story of Mr. Bottle's better half, but it was Mr. Bottle who bought the bonnet.

Mr. Bottle, two years ago, lacked the one thing he needed most—work, and possessed the one thing he wanted least—a drunken wife. Mrs. Bottle wasted no love upon her husband and no labour upon her children or her home. Until Mrs. Bottle, most astonishingly, was converted at a slum post meeting.

Mrs. Bottle ceased to drink and began to pray. She prayed that Mr. Bottle might find work, and he found it. She prayed that her elder children might do likewise, and sure enough to three of them employment came.

Mr. Bottle was uncomfortable about it. He didn't like his wife "going to the Army," and he signified the same in the manner usually observed among objecting husbands in the slums. But Mrs. Bottle persevered. She had one bad lapse at the end of a year, but though her grief over it was bitter she had the faith and courage to try again, and she obtained what the Army knows as "the blessing of a clean heart."

But recently she fell ill—gravely, alarmingly ill. At the hospital an operation was found to be necessary. "Humanly speaking," says the doctor, "there was not the ghost of a chance for her. Before she went under the anæsthetic I asked her if she was frightened. Her reply was that her children and the Army officers were praying for her. She was sure it would be all right. Why, then, should she be frightened? She is the bravest little woman I know. That she came through the operation satisfactorily is due absolutely to her quiet spirit and hope." (Mrs. Bottle, of course, puts it differently.)

Mr. Bottle, with his wife in hospital, was a sorry man. He looked round upon his slum home and his children, so different now as the consequence of Mother's conversion. And it was then that the great idea came to him. The slum officer was praying for her; therefore she would be sure to return. Why not give her a surprise? Full permission to go to the Army as and when she liked, and a bonnet to go in? He consulted the slum officer and the unthinkable thing was done.

Mr. and Mrs. Bottle have since removed from the slums and are installed in a Council housing suburb where they possess (in addition to the bonnet) a bathroom (h. and c.) and every convenience. It happened like this.

The landlord called upon them just after Mrs. Bottle's return from hospital. He had frequently called upon them in bygone

days, but that is neither here nor there. He brought them the news that the houses in their street had been condemned, and that he had been asked to recommend the four most respectable families for transference to the new suburb. One of the four was the Bottle family. And two years back the Bottle family had been in the depths, dragged there by a drunken woman.

Doctors and such-like people may set it down, if so they please, to the credit of Mrs. Bottle's quiet spirit and hope. But Mrs. Bottle, of course, puts it differently.

GOD IN THE SLUMS CHAP. V

THERE is a hospital matron somewhere in England to-day who owes her life as well as her position to an officer of the slums. They live their busy lives far removed from each other; the one in dignity and power, with the hush of the wards about her, the other in strenuous responsibility at a post surprisingly placed within sight and sound of the most famous sea-front in the British Isles. But once they met and strove together on the very brink of death.

The place of their meeting was a dark and dirty room in a street not far from that which the Bottle family once disgraced for a while by their presence. The officer had been summoned thither by a half-intoxicated woman who had run screaming to her quarters with word that her lodger was going to commit suicide and was threatening to kill anyone who interfered with her. It being part of the slum officer's ordinary round to prevent suicide and murder, she put on her hat and hurried through the rain to the address given. The door, at the top of a bare and rickety stair, was locked, but there was a scurrying behind it when she tapped, and then a silence. She tapped again.

"Who is it?" asked a woman's voice.

"Only me," said the slum officer. Tactful, perhaps, but hardly more informative than grammatical. The occupant of the room, in very unpleasant tones indeed, demanded to know more.

"It's the Salvation Army," vouchsafed the officer—who says, to-day, that she was frightened and could not think of any less comprehensive way of describing herself.

At once the door opened. "If it's the Army you can come in," said the voice, but with no kinder accent. And its owner, as soon as the officer had crossed the threshold, darted from some unseen lurking-place and turned the key in the lock behind her. "Now what's your business?" she shouted.

It was clear to the officer that she was in genuine danger. The woman had been drinking heavily and was more than half-demented, but she was still able to think quickly. The direct method was the only safe way of dealing with her, so the truth was told without dissembling. "I called to see you because I was told you were going to kill yourself," said the officer.

The woman came forward to the table. There were some scraps of food upon it and a long, thin-bladed knife, like those so deftly wielded by the proprietors of ham-and-beef shops. The visitor noticed the knife just a second too late: the woman's grip had already closed upon its handle. "That's right," she said, dropping her voice for the first time. "I'm going to die, and I'm going to die now. I've had more than enough of life, and this is going to be the end of it. Why shouldn't you die too? Why shouldn't we go together?"

Not by so much as a shake in her voice did the officer betray the alarm she felt. She knew that she must keep her self-control and play for time. "Well," she replied, as if weighing the proposal, "if I had to die to-night I should at least be ready for it. What about you? Are you quite sure you are ready also?"

It was a queer setting for a confessional. The traffic of the Tower Bridge rattled on its way at the distance of a street or two; the sounds and smells of the slums drifted sluggishly into the room on a tide of stale, damp air. The gas-light looked as if it also might be meditating self-extinguishment.

A questioning look crept into the woman's sullen face. The officer saw it, and was quick to press her advantage. "Couldn't we pray?" she asked. "It wouldn't be nice to die without trying to say a prayer, would it?" And praying already in silence she went upon her knees by the table. The other, after a few seconds of hesitation, knelt beside her. The knife was still clasped in her right hand, and the officer's left hand, falling softly but strongly upon her wrist, held it fast. So they prayed, and perhaps a stranger prayer was never offered. Words came with difficulty at first, because of the distraction of listening for steps upon the staircase, but gradually the petition took life, and as it did so fear withdrew. Then, in a

flood of simple words, the wonder of an understanding Christ was told to a soul in torment. She, who for years had carried her secrets in her own heart, for shame of sharing them and want of a friend to share them with, heard how already they were known and sorrowed over. To her own amazement she found herself believing it. This was prayer as she had never heard it before; prayer with so vivid a sureness about it that it became impossible to doubt the presence of the Person addressed. Her grasp of the knife handle relaxed, and the weapon fell to the floor. The slum officer knew that victory was in sight.

When they arose, her arm was about the woman's waist and tears were upon their faces. Ten minutes earlier one of them had contemplated murder and suicide: now she sank back in a chair, shaking but sober, and the woman she would have killed bent over her and kissed her.

A kiss—and a cup of tea. The one to warm the heart; the other to stop the shivering of a body in the throes of a violent reaction. The two in combination to draw out as sad a story as well could be imagined.

The woman who sat there telling it, unkempt and gross of body, with clothes so ragged and scanty that it was impossible for her to go out until the slum officer had fetched additional garments, was of good birth and education. She had trained as a nurse and had risen to the rank of sister in a London hospital. Then, as the consequence of an unfortunate companionship, she had developed a craving for whisky. There came a day when she should have been present at an operation upon a distinguished patient, but was so fuddled that she had to be relieved of her duties. For this unforgivable offence she was instantly dismissed, with a career that had promised to be brilliant in ruins. She could not face her friends and she had spent all her money: in this extremity she was reduced to seeking help from one of the ward-maids, who sent her to her own mother, a drunkard herself. The two women lived together and drank together, each holding the other down, until the night when one of them broke out in suicidal frenzy and the other ran to the slum post for assistance.

The slum officer told her what she never could have credited, had it not been for the strange conviction which had seized her as they knelt in prayer. Believing herself so hopelessly in the toils of her craving that suicide offered the only escape, she heard a doctrine expounded to her which in an astonishing manner pointed her back to life. As if in a dream, she assented

to the officer's proposition that she should enter one of the Army's homes for inebriates; and out of that home, in due course, there came a re-created being. Means were eventually found by which she was able to return to her former profession and, more than that, to succeed in it.

Slum officers are few who have not at some time or other risked their lives, as this one did, in averting crimes of violence. The fearlessness with which even an inexperienced lieutenant will intervene in a gang fight is not less remarkable than the general efficacy of the intervention. There was a recent instance in which two dangerous East End gangs collided in a Kentish village on a Sunday evening during the hop-picking season, when most of the London slum officers migrate to the country with their parishioners. A savage encounter took place within a stone's throw of the Army's open-air meeting. Razors and knives were in evidence and the one constable was powerless: but a slum lieutenant who had seen the glint of steel left her own ring and threw herself among the fighters just as one of them was swinging a heavy motor wrench at another's head. Had the blow fallen where it was aimed murder would undoubtedly have been done. As things fell out the lieutenant diverted it, and the weapon, glancing aside, struck her in the face. It caused an ugly wound and came within an inch of destroying an eye, but the fight stopped on the instant, and that, in the lieutenant's view, was all that mattered.

The genuine concern of the combatants on both sides at the affront involuntarily offered to a uniform which commands respect even amongst the worst elements of society is something to remember. It calls to mind the testimony of Mark concerning the demoniacs healed by the Master in the afterglow of sunset on that never-to-be-forgotten evening at Capernaum. As surely as the devils "knew Him" then, so is He recognised to-day by devil-possessed men and women in these quietly heroic servants of His, who cast out devils by the same eternal power—the power of Love.

Shrewd sense and sound psychology are very important auxiliaries in the work of exorcism. Probably there is nobody who better understands the peculiar psychology of the bully than the slum officer; and often the knowledge has guided her in taking action along unusual lines. They tell a story of a certain ensign whose indignation was justly roused by the brutal treatment meted out to one of her women by the latter's husband. Time and again the woman came to her with features battered almost out of recognition, and at length the

ensign could bear it no longer. There is nothing in the Army's "Orders and Regulations for Slum Work" providing for the advice which she gave, but its wisdom was sufficiently proved in the result. "If he hits you again," she told her afflicted caller, "hit him back, and he'll soon stop it. Hit him with the rolling-pin. And if you can't hit him hard enough, bring him to me."

The advice was followed to the letter. There was no man in town more astonished than that wife-beater when his ordinarily meek victim countered his blows with a hefty tap from the instrument specified.

"Wotchadoin'?" he demanded, in pained protest.

"Doin' wot ensign told me to do," replied his better half, truthfully.

Five minutes later the couple arrived with a certain breathlessness at the slum post. The husband requested to be informed if his wife's allegation were correct. The officer assured him that it was, in every particular. "And I told her that if she couldn't finish you off, I would," she added.

Bill the bully bullied no more after that evening. He turned up his sleeves and he glared at the blue-uniformed woman—half his own stature—who faced him so confidently, with merriment dancing in her eyes. And then he burst into a great roar of laughter. In the profane fashion of his kind—and there was no intentional offence in his profanity—he voiced his admiration of her impudence, and shook hands on it. After which they all had tea together and talked things over to a satisfactory issue. Unorthodox?—Beyond question. Un-Christlike?—Surely not, except to those who, greatly to their own souls' hurt, see Christ invariably as a stained-glass type and never as One who laughed at wholesome fun and the rough justice of His fisher friends.

There is another officer who smiles at times over the recollection of a Saturday night in Walworth when she virtually put a heavy-weight boxer to sleep. The man, an ex-champion, was a brute of the worst description, and might have gone to the gallows if the screams of his diminutive wife had not brought the officer rushing to their bedroom. She found the boxer, maddened with drink, kneeling over the prostrate woman, whom he had beaten unmercifully, and near to killing her, with two terrified children looking on. But as soon as he caught sight of her, he rushed into an adjoining room and there remained, trembling violently and showing other signs suggestive of delirium tremens, for which reason the officer, after

taking the wife and children downstairs, went out in quest of a policeman and besought him to come in. The constable knew his man too well, and flatly refused: three other men, one of them in khaki, did likewise. There was nothing for it but to return herself to the scene of battle.

The boxer was where she had left him. She asked him sharply what he was doing there. And he replied—reasonably enough, since it was a bedroom that he was in—that he was going to bed. He said it haltingly and apologetically, like a small boy in disgrace, and it dawned upon the astonished officer that this giant of the South London slums, this hero of the prize ring, was afraid of her.

What does a young woman do who has struck panic into the heart of a heavy-weight and chased him into his bedroom? What should she do, but dare him to come out again? And warn him that it was her purpose to wait outside the door until he was undressed and in bed. She stood sentry, as a matter of fact, until she heard him snoring, and then—it was three o'clock in the morning—she made some tea for his wife and, with the children, fixed her up in the back room for the remainder of the hours of rest. Two children came, clean-scrubbed and happy, to the juniors' meeting that Sunday morning. All was still quiet on the Walworth front.

Stories like these abound in the reports of the Slum Department, and usually there is a cup of tea in them, though sometimes it may be coffee. Once, at two in the morning, the police knocked up a London slum post to say that they heard screams of "murder!" coming from a tenement house. They could not themselves enter the place, but would wait outside if the officer would investigate. The captain was away on holiday, and it was the young lieutenant, holding the post alone, who climbed to that tenement room and ended by making tea for a man whom she discovered attacking his wife with an axe, with six screaming children for audience, including a baby only a few weeks old. Husband and wife were both drunk, but a blow from his axe which the lieutenant received as she ran between them sobered the man almost completely, and a big lump of soda which was dropped in his tea-cup did the rest. When he felt better he went to sleep. The lieutenant, on the other hand, kept vigil until eight o'clock, prepared the best breakfast she could with the scanty food available, and made the children ready for school before she left with a prayer and a blessing.

From the records of the same region comes the nightmare

story of Christmas in Honey Court. Hear how it starts in the matter-of-fact narrative of the officer principally concerned:

> Christmas Eve, 11 p.m. Officer led by God to dark doorway where only man's white face seen and gurgling sound heard. Man trying to strangle woman. After separating, man taken to quarters. Given strong tea and soda. Lieutenant left on sentry-go. . . .

Mark those two words "after separating." And now hear their meaning. Honey Court is not well named. Anything less mellifluous, in fact, it would not be easy to discover at any season of the year; and on this particular Christmas Eve half the police of the district had had their work cut out to disentangle its nine best known inhabitants from a general upheaval. The slum captain, single-handed, had also intervened; and it was when the police had gone that she was "led by God" to the dark doorway.

At first she could see nothing at all. There was only that horrible choking sound to warn her that something evil was afoot, there in the shadows. You can figure her, frail in appearance but utterly unafraid, peering into the blackness and seeing a pale blur gradually taking shape as a man's face. Seeing then, at waist level, three more blurs; the face of a woman and two hands labouring beneath it. One minute more and the hands would have done their dreadful business.

So the captain "separated" the strangler and his victim. She did it by the first and simplest method which occurred to her, by taking a flying jump at him and bearing him to the ground, thereby breaking his hold. Any girl, of course, alone in a dark street at midnight or near it would tackle a murderer in the same way; and the captain merely makes note that "after separating" she took the man to the quarters. She does not mention that she begged him away from the police, who had reappeared upon the scene: only that she gave him tea and soda to sober him, and then withdrew, leaving her lieutenant on guard. Not the faintest indication here that there is anything out of the ordinary in this. One stops a murder, collects its would-be perpetrator and brings him home, makes tea for him, and then goes out again until the small hours, leaving him in the care of the only other occupant of the house, a girl younger (but not one whit less plucky) than oneself. If you are a slum officer it is just like that.

In Honey Court, when the captain returned there, things

were pretty bad. There had been a fight in the home before the affair in the dark entry; and by the light of a candle she surveyed the evidence of it; broken pictures, paper chains ripped down, an oil lamp knocked over and paraffin dripping from the table. Amidst the wreckage sat the woman she had rescued, her face gashed, her clothing torn and blood-stained. Her man had sought to cut her throat, but if only he would come back to her she would try to be different. Which is woman-nature, and not in the slums alone.

Her man, at that moment, was in no fit state for home-coming. From the arm-chair beside the slum post fireplace he had slithered into the coal cauldron, and there he remained, with a very uneasy balance on the Derby brights and the dutiful lieutenant bidding him sit still. He sat there till the captain came again and talked him, as she thought, into a Christmas mood of marital good-will. But when he accompanied her to Honey Court the mood changed suddenly, and instead of offering his wife his hand he threw his boot at her. After that he went back to the slum post and fell asleep on the best hearthrug.

The period which followed was thick with incident. To begin with, there was a knotty problem of convention. In a neighbourhood so jealous of the proprieties, the presence of a gentleman upon one's hearthrug, in the circumstances hereinbefore recited, is in itself sufficient to provoke a tumult. The officers, therefore, opened their window to the world, and sat at it for all to see. They also opened their door to the police, who consented to include the hearthrug in their beat until the sleeper should awaken. But scarce had quiet been re-established when the air was rent with lamentation. It was Rachel, or more correctly, Lizzie, weeping for her husband, and refusing to be comforted because he was not. The captain puts it on record that she "remonstrated with her and sent her away." Not for long. Soon there was a voice in Ramah once more:

"Lidy, lidy! Where's me 'usband?
"Sister, sister! 'ave you got me 'usband?
"O lidy! Let me 'ave me 'usband. Do, *please*, sister! *Aaaiiii-oo-oo!*"

The street got out of bed and joined in the petition, more or less emphatically, but mostly more. The police, unable to move her on, moved Lizzie in. And there on the hearthrug, at four o'clock on Christmas morning, peace was at last

concluded. Lizzie and her swain, with an escort of constables, returned to Honey Court; and although for a fortnight she was in danger of death from tetanus, following the wound in her face, she eventually made a good recovery.

Were these tales confined to the courage of the central characters they would still be worth the telling, but in cases by the dozen there is something greater to be added. For the slum officer, intervention means contact, and contact, very often, means conversion. This is the hope by which she is nerved: the nature of the contact and the risk it may entail count for nothing if only it can be realised.

There is a commandant in a South of England post of whom it is said that she has several times been knocked down and that in every case the assailant has become her convert. One of her conquests is a woman whose wildness in the days gone by was something almost beyond belief. It was such that, in her anger at having been rebuked in the street, she gained admission to the slum post by a ruse and assaulted the officer with all the ferocity of a beast. She had asked that a minor injury to her hand might be attended to, and while the commandant was engaged in this work of mercy she dealt her a terrific blow on the head. Again and again she struck her, until the officer, almost senseless, managed to escape to the stairs. Then came reaction. Awed at what she had done, and knowing the love in which the commandant was held by her people, she broke into a storm of tears and falling on her knees implored forgiveness. It was the commandant herself who came downstairs to comfort her.

"They'll kill me when they know what I've done to you," said the woman, weeping passionately.

"Don't cry, dear," was the reply. "I won't let anyone know."

Can it be wondered at that souls like this win others? A quiet, good-humoured woman tells the story now, as once she narrated it to the people she had so much feared. She says—and indeed it is beyond dispute—that she is a new creature. And she adds, in explanation, that her heart was "broken by Love."

ONE October evening the three officers of a seaport slum post entertained a visitor. All the day through they had been speaking of her: clearly she occupied a particular place in their affections. Presently she came, a mother with a baby in her arms.

They clustered about her, with sympathy for her pale and fragile prettiness and soothing words for the little one. Their greetings over, one of them prayed that God, who knew all about Maggie, would take her under His especial care and bless her through her mother love.

God who knew all about Maggie! To those who shared the knowledge few phrases could more vividly evoke the vision of Divine compassion. For Maggie was fourteen, and her baby, the child of a Maltese sailor, had been born in the Poor Law infirmary just a week before. Bred in a dark, unventilated cellar, where sewage came seeping through the damp, stone walls, she had never seen life except at its foulest. Dockland, garish with low restaurants and brothels, had been her nearest approach to Heaven.

Facts of this kind are not much fancied by writers of the Limehouse school, yet they are the stuff of which much of the real tragedy of Limehouse is compounded. The story of Maggie is not, it is true, a Limehouse story; but Maggie has numerous sisters, in Limehouse and in Liverpool, in Cardiff and the Clyde ports, wherever the sea, the cleanest thing in creation, casts up a scum of lust and wickedness. The names of many are upon the slum post books, and every kind of horror is inscribed against them—somewhere one reads of a girl mother with three children, negro, Arab, and Chinese—but these, in the main, are the names of salvaged souls. Wonderful as the list is, how much more wonderful it might be made could funds be raised to set new bands of rescuers at work.

There is material at hand for the study in some detail of need and possibilities: five cases, extracts from one report-book, will serve the purpose well. Drawn from a single London district, which has the gateway of the West India Docks as its geographical centre, they typify conditions of which the world takes little heed and for which it accepts less responsibility. They may be stated first in summary form:

(*a*) Young girl. Sold by elder sister and deserted by Chinese husband. Found starving.

(*b*) Waitress from country. Aged nineteen. Rescued in nick of time from Chinese procurer.
(*c*) Girl of fifteen. On streets for a month. Mother in prison.
(*d*) Girl of fourteen. Already for some years living immoral life among negroes and lascars. Later married by Chinaman and deserted.
(*e*) Girl of fifteen. Turned out of home. Died of exhaustion after giving birth to twin babes. Father unknown.

Of these unhappy children, all except the last have been saved through the watchfulness and love of the slum officers. They are leading respectable and normally happy lives, and helping others out of the fullness of their own experience. The hideous years of the past have scarcely left a mark upon them.

Door-to-door visitation was the means by which the first was found. Some strange guidance led the officer to a house which gave no answer to her knocking, and the same instinct bade her enter at the open door. Sitting silently in one of the rooms was the girl whom her sister had sold into shame. Abandoned by her purchaser, and by the Chinaman whom she had afterwards married, she had found ways—good looks and fine clothes afforded too evident a clue to them—of making friends and money, until she fell ill. Now she was penniless and hungry: it was late in the day and no food had passed her lips since six o'clock in the morning. The gentle, mothering woman, who came to her so unexpectedly in her need, who stroked her hair, spoke kindly to her and flitted about the place making a meal ready, must have seemed very much like an angel in human guise. The lonely girl went that evening to the meeting in the little Army hall, and there, where so many of her kind have found an answer to the sad riddle of their lives, she began life anew.

If this was a chance encounter, so too was the next upon the list. A letter came to the slum post, bearing the one direction, "Captain." It was opened by the slum captain, who quickly saw that it was not intended for her, but who, because of what it contained, made speed to reach the address from which it had been sent. Its writer was a girl who had come from the country to enter domestic service in London, but, finding the life irksome, had obtained employment at a tea-shop. Here she had met the "captain" for whom her letter was meant, a Chinaman well versed in all the wiles of his evil calling, who had

promised her marriage and a beautiful home. The letter, so mysteriously diverted from its destination, was an acceptance of his proposal.

It was not an easy matter for the slum officer to convince the girl that she was on the point of walking into a trap; but at length she offered to take her to some women whose histories would show her all too plainly the fate she might expect if she disregarded the warning. It was sufficient: the disillusioned girl promised to return to her home in the morning, and the officer paid her fare. Within twenty-four hours a grateful mother wrote to the slum post refunding the money:

> "If you have any children in your care who need a holiday," the letter concluded, "send them to us. We are not rich enough to pay their fares—my husband is a farm labourer—but we have a garden and plenty of fruit and vegetables, and we will gladly keep them for a fortnight."

This is the usury of a good deed. Is it, in truth, only chance begetting chance? Or should it not rather be recognised that the blessing of the loaves and fishes is one of the miracles of every day?

It was for neglecting her children and burning them with a red-hot poker that the mother of the third girl was sent to prison. The slum officers were informed of the case by one of the "cruelty men," as the inspectors of the N.S.P.C.C. are known in the East End. They found the smaller members of the family in an unspeakably dirty state and terribly scarred. "My mammy did that," said one of them, with pitiful frankness, to the officer who was dressing the wounds; and "you ain't going to take me to *mammy*?" was the frightened query of a four-year-old. Out of this hell the eldest girl had fled to the yet worse hell of the pavements, and it was difficult to come at her, but persistence brought its reward, and the slum captain added one more rescue to her roll. The girl was found a situation in which she was affectionately treated, and rose rapidly in the estimation of those employing her. More than this, the mother (whose gaol-born baby had died within the prison walls) was met by a slum officer on her release and, under the same influence, restored to decency and a right mind. She, too, was provided with a situation and a chance of making good, the children meantime being sent to homes. With a sympathetic interest the law watched an experiment which proved entirely successful. Both mother and daughter are entered upon the report as "doing well."

The light of a wondrously changed experience redeems the fourth of these cases from the darkness of the pit which closes about the last of them. Let the concluding story be told as it stands in the report-book: it is one of those documents which are not susceptible of embellishment:

"The slum officer's attention was attracted, during a walk around the docks, by the sound of sobbing. She went in the direction from which the sound came, and saw a young girl seated on one of the stumps used as mooring posts for ships.

"'What is the matter? Are you in trouble?' the officer asked. The girl, however, did not answer, but continued crying, with her head down and her face hidden.

"'Come, hold up your head!' said the officer. 'It's the Army captain talking to you.'

"At once the girl stood up. She was an expectant mother, fifteen years old, and her father had refused to have her in the house. Her mother, nevertheless, had been in the habit of letting her in at midnight and turning her out again in the early morning. Every day for four months she had been sitting on the stump by the dock side, keeping a look-out for the man who was the father of her coming child.

"Asked if she had had anything to eat—it was past midday—she said she had not, and was taken to a coffee stall. The captain then went to the address which the girl had given, a poor-looking place, of which the front was tumbling down. After much knocking a woman came to the door, who admitted to being the mother, but implored the officer not to let the girl be seen by her father, as he would certainly beat her and might even murder her. The officer's answer was that she would herself interview the father, if need were, but that, in any case, the girl must be allowed to come home. Otherwise, or if she were beaten, the 'cruelty man' should certainly be informed. The mother thereupon promised to get her into the house again, and the officer fetched her.

"A week later the officer was summoned in the early morning. The girl had been removed to hospital the night before, and had there given birth to twins. Both the babies were dead, and she herself was dying from exhaustion. The officer hurried to the hospital, and was in time to point the dying girl to the Saviour, remaining at her bedside until she passed away.

"The parents were so frightened that they disappeared, and have not since been heard of."

The false romance of Limehouse is shivered by these chronicles of sorrow. But the true romance remains; and out

of the Limehouse district has come one of the most exalting records of devoted service that the annals of the Salvation Army can produce.

Twenty years ago and more it began, when a frail, undersized woman went to live in Pennyfields, the strangely-named thoroughfare which links Limehouse Causeway with Poplar High Street. She was an officer whose health had not been equal to the strain of the Army's "field" work, and who had consequently been transferred to a desk at headquarters. Withdrawal from the battle-front was something to which she could not reconcile herself. It was not only that she was afire with an intense religious enthusiasm: she was possessed by the conviction that in some way yet to be revealed to her she was to do a special work among the Chinese people. She had never been to China; plainly she was debarred by her physique from venturing upon the rigours of a missionary life; she was almost wholly without means. But these were things of which she took no count: God's plan, in her belief, depended upon her co-operation, and infinitesimal though her share in it might be she dared not leave it undischarged. If to the East she might not go, at least she could go to the East End, perhaps to find her task awaiting her among its growing Chinese colony. So Catherine Hine answered her call, and in her spare time learned her way about the labyrinth of streets where dwell the laundrymen, the stewards and sea-cooks, the restaurant keepers, and the drivers of more questionable trades who have made this country their abiding-place for the time being.

She had a great gift of inspiring confidence and compelling honesty; and by its aid she gained a remarkable insight into the Chinese character, so grievously misunderstood by the majority of English people. Moving continuously among these folk, she grew accustomed to their alien appearance, their weak and narrow eyes and high, gaunt cheek-bones, their chirping talk and quiet litheness of motion; and she recognised in them the children entrusted to her care, easy to love and quick to learn. They, for their part, responded eagerly, and soon she gained from them the name of "Little Teacher." Her slender knowledge of the Chinese language, self-acquired, was extended by hard study, often late into the night; and a tiny class-room was opened in which the "Little Teacher" laboured to make known the lesser mysteries of English and the greater mysteries of God.

It was labour which took heavy toll of her strength, but it prospered beyond imagining, and it was a wise decision of

Headquarters to further it by giving it recognition as a special missionary effort, associated with the slum operations in the same district. The little hall was rented for her—by a happy thought the rent was made a charge upon the Army's Foreign Office—and when it was seen that her health threatened to give way altogether under a double strain, she was granted her retirement from Headquarters, with the rank of Adjutant, so that she might devote herself to Pennyfields alone.

About this time her ready sympathies were roused by something which befell a woman of the neighbourhood. There is a note of it among the scattered papers which await the shaping hand of a biographer:

> An Englishwoman who had been living with a Chinaman attended a week-day mothers' gathering, taking her Chinese baby with her. Because she enjoyed the meeting, she went again the following week, but was then approached by the minister, who asked her not to come any more, "as the other women would stay away if she did." The woman left in tears, remarking: "I am a sinner, I know, but isn't there anywhere that a sinner may go?"

That sad rejoinder, brought to Adjutant Hine's ears, bore immediate fruit. She opened work at once among the women.

She now had an extraordinary following. Two or three times a week her hall was packed with children, white, yellow, black, and half-caste. Two or three times it was thronged with women. And at all manner of hours—for the Adjutant never considered herself, but fashioned her plans to meet the requirements of her people, there were classes for the patient, enquiring men over whom she yearned above all others. Sometimes they came to her late in the night; sometimes before the day had broken, for often they worked at odd times. They sat at her feet while she taught them to read, to write, to count, to understand the essentials of her Faith: and all these things were so wonderfully blended in her improvised curriculum that each was graved with equal depth upon her listeners' quick perception. She frequently taught with the aid of the coloured scrolls that are to be seen upon the walls of Sunday schools: the picture of the Good Shepherd, holding the rescued lamb in His bosom, was a special favourite of hers and theirs.

"Man," she would say, pointing with a ruler to the figure of Christ; and "man," the dutiful class would chorus after her. "Shepherd," she would insist, and "lamb," and so forth, line

upon line, until, as they grasped the meanings of strange new sounds through their pictorial equivalents, their minds were seized with the parable in outline, and the story of the Shepherd who yet is seeking for His other sheep was brought home to them by the counting of the Adjutant's own fold. It was an unforgettable experience to be admitted to one of these class meetings, and some of those surviving comrades to whom the privilege was granted find the tears standing in their eyes when they recall the infinite patience of the "Little Teacher" and its triumph over every difficulty.

The hall was decked with Chinese symbols, and to enter it, or the Adjutant's upstair room, which might have been a fragment of the China she had never seen, was like passing into another world. But it was the flag of the Salvation Army, with its bright significance, carefully explained to them, which most of all appealed to her disciples. For them it was like one of their own ideographs: to see it, ever afterwards, was to be reminded of the person and the spirit of their preceptor. Some scores of Chinese Christians, distant from Limehouse quite four thousand miles, owe to this fact their lives.

To one of her converts, on his departure for his native land, the Adjutant gave an Army flag by way of keepsake. They laughed at him when he returned to his village, in China's far interior; laughed at his flag and at his strange new creed. But he was patient, as the "Little Teacher" had been patient with him, and in time he too began to gather followers. Then came a wave of trouble. Civil war raged: murder and rapine stalked the land. Word was brought that a rebel army was marching on the village. Torture and death had been the lot of native Christians everywhere along the rebels' path and fear laid hold upon the small community. They sought their leader with crumbling faith. "Now is the time," they said, "to show us if your teaching has been true. Either this God can save us or He is a lie. Tell us if we can trust Him now."

Deep in his soul he doubted. Often had God come close to him in times of less urgent need, but now He seemed infinitely remote. Here was indeed a test. If prayer could move His arm, as "Little Teacher" had said . . .

"Little Teacher!" How would she have acted, supposing she had been placed as he was placed? Well he knew. She would have talked to God, in her own intimate fashion; she would have silenced doubt by her own unfaltering confidence; then, in the supreme moment of trial, she would have chosen the post of greatest danger, so that, if need arose, she, like her

own great Captain, might lay down her life in an effort to save her friends. He looked at her flag, hanging from the wall of his room, and he took it down and prayed. He made reply to his questioners that God would certainly protect them. Then, flag in hand, he went out to meet the raiders—alone.

* * * * * *

He had no very clear idea afterwards of what it was he had hoped to do. It did not matter, in any case, because what happened was something he could not possibly have foreseen. The colours carried by the self-appointed envoy were recognised by the leader of the rebels. He also had lived in London; had known and reverenced the "Little Teacher." By curious question and excited answer the two men proved the bond between them, and the hand of death was stayed. The raiding column passed on its way, nor was the slightest hurt inflicted on any in that village.

Rank it no higher than a coincidence, and still it is an astounding one. Some hundreds of men, it is true, passed through the little hall in Pennyfields, but what proportion do they bear to China's four hundred millions? It was a minor miracle that two should meet at all: that they should meet in such a way was something for which "miracle" seems altogether an inadequate word.

A London schoolboy with a bent for electrical science presses the key of a home-made instrument and gives the news of home to a whaler tumbling in the swells that break against the Great Ice Barrier. Who cares?—the wonder of wireless is already stale. With faith as her sole resource, a woman called of God to "help China" essays an answer from a London slum, and away in that far country the lives of men she never heard of are saved through the radiation of her selfless love. Who believes it?—the world has grown too old for fairy tales.

* * * * * *

Pennyfields is no place in which to fight the germs of consumption. They worked their ravages relentlessly in a body long too enfeebled to resist them, and the day came at last when Catherine Hine was forced to resign her task to others. She knew that the end could not be long in coming, and she remembered how her converts had made her promise that she would meet them "at the East Gate"—the portal by which every Chinese Christian believes that he will enter the Celestial City. Meantime, however, she had a longing for the countryside; for low hills seen against the gold of sunset and voices of

home-going children borne on a little wind across the fields at evening.

Her wish was granted in a singularly moving manner. Another retired officer, one who for many years had served in the Chinese field, took her to spend the closing days of life with her at her cottage in the Weald of Kent. A Chinese name is painted on the garden gate and everything within the walls is redolent of China; but all the loveliness without is England, the land of hop-field, garden, and meandering stream that spreads itself in welcome to returning exiles and tells them they are surely home. From her bed by the window the Adjutant could follow the young Medway's winding course on the far side of the leas, and the sun looked in on her most evenings before he hid himself behind the shoulder of the North Downs.

On a Friday evening in March, 1930, when the fields were dotted with young lambs, she died. All through the week she had been delirious. In the fever which possessed her, she fancied herself back in Pennyfields, and tried repeatedly to rise from bed that she might take her class and pay her visits to the sick. Hour after hour they heard her teaching, counting, explaining, telling the story of the Good Shepherd. Suddenly she ceased, and a smile as of some glad greeting shone on her wasted face. The long lesson was ended.

Two people knelt beside her coffin on the following day who had been in Westminster on that memorable Saturday of the floods. Both of them called her comrade, though one had never met her while she lived. He was a man known to the officers of many slum posts as "Big Brother," which title, as he often said, he valued far above any other that might have come his way.

The Major, who once had challenged him in the matter of a sack, looked at him now with a whispered request; and "Big Brother," whom the years between had taught how mighty things may spring from mean beginnings, prayed to the "Little Teacher's" God. He prayed that she might yet remain among them; that, sweeping victorious through the Eastern Gate, leading her company of converts, she might glance back at those who there took leave of her, and, by the glad vision of her triumph, spur them to carry on her teaching.

A FEW months after the floods at Westminster the night editor went to the south coast for a holiday. Among his friends in that part of the country he numbered several Salvationists, and it was one of these who suggested a visit to the Brighton slum post. He had never suspected the existence of slums in Brighton—few non-residents do, though they are far from hidden—and he was genuinely anxious to see what they were like; but it was more the thought of renewing contact with the slum officers that prompted his acceptance of the invitation. And so, on a Thursday evening, he and his friend made their way to the dismal thoroughfare, since the site of a clearance scheme, on which some humorist had bestowed the name of Lavender Street.

It was his first experience of a meeting in one of the slum post halls, and it was destined to leave upon his mind an ineffaceable impression. He found that, as a visitor, he was expected to speak; and because of the intimate nature of the little gathering he spoke in an intimate way.

He told his hearers of a great sorrow that had come to him a year before and still was over him, the illness of one he dearly loved. He told of a night when the angel of death was in his home, when the doctors shook their heads and the nurses said that human skill could do no more. And then he told how, in his agony, he had thrown himself down in his study and begged of God that this blow might be spared him; how he had felt, at once, a reassurance; and how, in fact, the fever suddenly diminished, so that, within an hour, the patient's temperature was normal and the long, long process of recovery began.

He spoke a little of the mystery of suffering, so frequently an obstacle to faith. His had been a selfish and successful life, he said, until a year ago, when he had undergone a spiritual revolution. Almost at once the bolt had fallen. Was that a denial of God's love? Or was it not rather proof of it? The God whom he had disavowed had pitied him; knowing what lay ahead had taken hold of him, that when the hour had struck he might be conscious of a Friend's sustaining presence.

Unknown to him, there was one in the hall that evening, a young woman, who had lost faith because of the burden of her own ill-health. Greatly to his surprise she came forward, during the singing of the hymn which followed his address,

and knelt at the chair which did duty for a penitent-form. They told him, when the meeting was over, how through his homely words the message of which she had stood in need had come to her; and, wondering, he went away. He had never regarded himself as a mystic, and he shrank from the assumption of anything in the nature of a Divine call directed to himself, but he could not escape the feeling that some compelling power was leading him. Then, and on several occasions afterwards, it was as if the pylons of a majestic gateway towered above him into heaven, casting a shade in which he waited for the word to enter. But of the road which lay between them, and beyond, he could discern nothing.

He revisited Brighton a week later and this time joined the officers of the slum post at an open-air meeting. It was held in a forbidding street, made up for the most part of taverns, lodging-houses, and ill-favoured entrances to courts and stables. Although it was summer, the evening was unpropitious: it was cold, and wet, and prematurely dark. The chances of any considerable congregation seemed meagre, but the officers were not daunted and the meeting began. A loiterer or two looked on in curiosity while a prayer was offered: slatternly women drew back the grimy curtains of still grimier windows as a man's strong voice (he was a greengrocer and was well used to making himself heard) carried the words of an old song into the farthest corners. But something happened when the song began which gripped the night editor's imagination so strongly that it made him choke. Out of the doorways the children of the slums came running; bare-footed, ragged, tousled, and dirty, but one and all possessed by the same desire—to sing. They jostled one another round the ring and propounded comment of a disturbing frankness; but they knew that their special turn would come and they did nothing to jeopardise its coming. Presently, when a woman had spoken words of testimony, the officer in charge held her hand up. "Now, what about a chorus for the children?" she said.

Instantly, a dozen shrill voices made conflicting proposals. The most insistent carried the day, and the street rang with this artless refrain:

I've got the joy, joy, joy, joy, down in my heart,
Down in my heart,
Down in my heart.
I've got the joy, joy, joy, joy, down in my heart;
Glory to His name!

Not much in these words to cause a lump in the throat. But hear them sung by children whose conception of joy is a night when mother is not drunk, and they are filled with a significance which hurts. And so on, through an evidently familiar repertoire. The night editor felt his hand grasped, and looking down met the solemn gaze of two very round blue eyes, upturned to his in wonderment, as he tried to help in the singing of another highly popular number:

G, double-O, D,—good.
G, double-O, D,—good.
I want to be
More like Jesus,
G, double-O, D,—good.

The touch of the grubby little fingers, trustingly interwoven with his own, went straight to his heart. A damsel of four had effectively stopped his singing, but she had also given him the answer to the question he had been asking himself all the week. He knew now whither the gateway led.

He returned to London aware that henceforth work awaited him in the slums, and, in particular, among the slum children. How to translate the knowledge into action, however, he was uncertain: the first two or three people to whom he spoke about it were not specially helpful, and the Major, whom he knew, by this time, to be second-in-command of the slum operations, was away. For some days, therefore, he remained in a state of hesitation.

Meanwhile, though, of course, he could not guess it, the demands of the work were pressing heavily upon those who had the direction of it. The heart of the Slum Secretary—of whom he had had a fleeting glimpse when, as "the Colonel," she swooped down on Westminster and bore the Major away to give her food by force—ached with the need and the apparent impossibility of meeting it. It was not a matter of funds for the relief of distress—a splendid gesture of anonymous beneficence had freed her from anxiety on that score,—it was the problem of a budget so constricted that any increase in personnel was out of the question. If people could only be made to realise the urgency of the position, she thought, there would be no lack of helpers. There would be volunteers from within the Army and from outside; they could be organised into a Slum Brigade; the whole campaign would take on a new aspect. Yes, the solution would have to

be sought on the basis of unpaid, voluntary labour, at any rate for the time being: she would pray to God to send the volunteers along.

The night editor, walking down Queen Victoria Street to his office, collided with a man outside the door of International Headquarters. It was an officer with whom he had a slight acquaintance, and he seized the opportunity to ask his advice. Twenty-four hours later the Slum Secretary had enrolled the first lay member of her Brigade.

She gave him a silver shield to wear in his coat lapel, and she made its bestowal the occasion of a characteristic slum ceremony. There was a presentation of colours to the Bethnal Green post, and under the new flag, held in the trembling hands of the Home League's oldest member, he was formally admitted to big brotherhood. Thereafter he reported for slum duty once a week; and because he stipulated that he should be given any sort of work that happened to need doing, and was taken at his word, occupation was found for him in astonishing variety. Comedy had a place in it as well as tragedy, and sometimes requests were made of him which he felt to be quite beyond his power to fulfil. It was then that he began to realise the literal exactness of the doctrine which has provided the Salvation Army with its immense driving power. Two things only were essential: unquestioning readiness to give God any service that might be asked of him, and unquestioning belief that, subject to this condition, God would both find the way and provide the means. The utter simplicity of the thing staggered him, *but it worked, and it worked every time.* The tremendous importance of this discovery swept him almost off his feet: it seemed beyond comprehension that the world about him could go on its way unheeding.

A man once over-sensitive to ridicule, he now occasionally found an almost riotous enjoyment in situations that had much of the ridiculous in them. The poor at times must change their residence in a hurry, and more than once he played the *rôle* of furniture remover. Half the population of a street in Stepney rejoiced exceedingly over his adventures with a chest of drawers: a considerable percentage of the inhabitants of Dockhead were entertained in equal measure by a turn, on the best *haute école* lines, with a performing mangle. And once he carried a child's collapsible cot all the way from Bethnal Green to Blackfriars, which is a distance of five miles. The first half-mile and the last mile and a half were covered

on foot, and were by far the least uncomfortable parts of the journey, notwithstanding an almost unbelievable degree of creakiness on the cot's part and much freely-vented speculation on the part of fellow pedestrians. For the rest of the distance he travelled by bus, and was vividly reminded in doing so of one of those dreams in which one remembers, when half-way up the aisle of Westminster Abbey, that the major portions of one's wardrobe have inadvertently been left behind.

To carry a cot, even a collapsible one, up the stairway and into the covered top of a swiftly moving bus, braving the caustic wit of an unsympathetic conductor, is one of the best-known methods of inducing free perspiration; a better, possibly, is to try to make a collapsible cot collapse sufficiently for it to be coaxed into the bus-top space normally occupied by one person not too slender of build, and to make the attempt when that one person is already there. "Big Brother" was conspicuously successful with both methods, and much helped by the fact that whenever the crowd on the bus was swelled by a fresh arrival, the cot promptly extruded a spare leg for the new-comer's undoing.

But this was a case in which the circumstances more than justified the risk of a rush-hour lynching. That day he had found a luckless family of five persons confined to quarters so cramped that a ten-months-old baby, having no room to lie at full length, was passing the nights upright in a push-chair, and thereby increasing hourly its chances of developing spinal curvature. Incidentally, a rent of fifteen shillings a week was being paid for this mis-called accommodation. The cot, begged from an Army crêche, was the urgent solution of the space problem.

Sad were the errands among the children on which he sometimes accompanied the slum officers, but sadness was tempered by admiration for the skill and tenderness with which the ministrations of the latter were performed. Saddening, too, were his visions of the loneliness endured by the aged poor. But here, again, there were compensations—the devotion of an out-of-work husband to a paralysed wife, the light of welcome in a sick woman's eyes, the childlike faith that, while with bowed heads they prayed, made of the meanest bedrooms holy ground. The gallant spirit of the blind was a thing at which he marvelled. They were for ever teaching him.

One day a lieutenant took him to see a girl who was both blind and crippled. They found her in a bright little room,

opening on to a slum courtyard. She was a tiny thing, and looked tinier seated on a foot-stool in a corner, with the headphones of a wireless set at her ears. "Big Brother," to Rosie's vast amusement, addressed her as one would address a child barely in her 'teens. But Rosie was twenty-four.

They showed him Rosie's photograph, the photograph of a sighted, healthy, schoolgirl taken when she was thirteen. That was the time of the air raids, and the air raids played untold havoc with the nerves of children whose parents were much too poor to move from the unhealthy neighbourhood of docks and bridges. There came a night when a bomb fell close to Rosie's home. She was not struck by its flying fragments, but the shock of the explosion was so terrific that it paralysed and blinded her. It stopped her dead, and from that moment Rosie never grew up, or walked, or saw the things that God intended her to take delight in. Here is a matter worthy the attention of the club-room warriors who talk so glibly of the next war.

A chance presented itself of taking Rosie for a drive in Hyde Park, and the outing provided a parable. The car threaded the crowded streets of the Borough and Lambeth and crossed the river at Westminster. Memory and the quick hearing of the blind helped her to picture scenes along the road; and a sick King, lying in his Palace bed-chamber, would have been moved in heart could he have known of the sightless eyes that were turned towards his window as they passed. Up Constitution Hill they went, on the *qui vive* for things they might describe to her, and gradually "Big Brother" was made conscious of a curious fact. There were bluebells growing in the lee of the King's high garden wall: he had never suspected that bluebells grew within a mile and a half of Fleet Street. The Park was a sunlit glory of late spring blossom, ablaze with rhododendrons and alive with the rustling language of the trees. The splash of oars came from the Serpentine; the piping of birds from the branches; the bleating of sheep from the grassy spaces. She saw it all as he talked, and he was astonished to find that he saw it all as well. Never before had he seen it all, despite long residence in London, until this day when he had been a blind girl's eyes. This was, perhaps, the best of the many lessons which the blind folk taught him: that they who would fully know the blessedness of everyday things should seek to make them seen of the unseeing, and so for themselves find new beauties in the commonplace.

It was a theme on which he frequently spoke in the slum

meetings, and one that strongly appealed to his hearers, whose instinct it mostly is to share their blessings with neighbours less fortunate. These meetings were seasons of deep refreshment to him. They were gatherings such as must have been common in the infant days of Christianity, and they were often marked by incidents which those early days knew better than these of the twentieth century. Simple people met together to talk of their needs and their experiences. If they had news to tell they told it in direct language, and those who listened were the more readily induced to believe them and to put their statements to the proof of personal trial. The Gospel was read to them with the same complete conviction under which it was written for them; and the promise that "where two or three are gathered together in My name, there am I in the midst of them," was accepted as absolutely as a proposition of science. Brought up in the tradition of those (and they are a multitude without number) who speak of "conversion" as if, save in relation to Saint Paul, it were something not quite nice to mention, he saw that the phenomenon of his own spiritual re-birth was in fact repeatedly paralleled, and men and women changed past recognition by the power made manifest in these assemblies. How great then was his joy when words were given him that led his listeners to decision. Holidays spent in touring the slum posts of the provinces, with each day ending in a meeting, and almost every meeting ending in conversions, were the truest holidays of his life.

Yet some of the things that touched and thrilled him most were happenings, not in the slums, but in his office and within the circle of his closest friends. The atmosphere of a great newspaper building could not be described as ostentatiously religious, and he had been fully prepared for difficulties; not, perhaps, for open hostility, but for restraints, avoidances, and suggestive silences. Never was fear less justified; never did colleagues show a more practical sympathy. They raised money for him; gave him their support at meetings; organised a wonderful Christmas party for a thousand slum children, and sent two contingents of the poorest of them into the country for a holiday. They loaded him with clothes and toys and wireless sets. One of them gave him a bicycle and one, quite without warning, a touring motor-car, this last-mentioned gift coming at the precise moment, during the hopping season, when the sudden, but not unexpected, decease of an ancient "battery" imperilled the whole plan of campaign on the Kentish front. Best of all, one of them gave himself.

"Big Brother" will not forget the day when his right-hand man on the paper sought him out and quietly made a profession of faith. There were two "big brothers" in the slums from that hour onward.

GOD IN THE SLUMS CHAP. VIII

ALMOST on the first day of her appointment to the London slums, a young officer, whose life had been lived in the country, where the farm lands of the south are swept by the breezes of the Channel, was summoned to a room in the East End. A man had just died in it from a peculiarly terrible form of cancer.

It was a single room, in which he and his wife and family had all been herded together day and night. Dead and living were there together now. There was an unbearable stench; yet, had there been any food, this was the only place in which it could have been eaten. As a matter of fact, there was not so much as a crust of bread. The man, long out of work and ill, had died without a penny: his very body was bare, save for a dirty rag: clothing and furniture had all gone to the pawnshop. Frightened neighbours held aloof, and there were no means with which to hire a woman to wash and lay out the corpse. In this extremity the Salvation Army officer had been sent for, and the untried country-bred lass prayed for nerve to face her awful task.

She found that the man had not possessed a shirt or anything else of which a shroud might decently be made, and the case was a nightmare of urgency: so she made a raid upon her own "bottom drawer," and from its few treasures took a best nightdress, in which she sent him to his burial.

There is scarcely one among the tales of horror filed in the Slum Department which is not relieved by some such deed of love. Here, for instance, is the story from Bath, to which passing reference was made in an earlier chapter: the story of a woman dying in a cellar kitchen within the shadow of the Abbey.

The cellar to which the slum officers were called was one beneath a large, old-fashioned house, let off in rooms. Its solitary tenant was looked upon as mad; and certainly her appearance suggested it. There was a hump upon her back,

her nails were like claws, and she was inconceivably dirty and neglected. Quite helpless by reason of her age and illness, she lay upon her filthy bed, while the great rats ran over her. She had managed to kill one of them, but they were bold with long impunity, and they came out noisily while one of the officers was talking to her, stealing the food she had put on the table.

The only light came from a candle stuck in a jar, and it was clearly an impossibility to treat a case of the kind in these conditions. Removal to the infirmary was suggested, but the woman begged that rather she might be allowed to die where she was. The officer, seized with a sudden impulse, leaned down to her.

"Would you like," she whispered, "to come and die with us?"

A look of astonishment crept into the fierce old face. "Oh, yes!" came the answer. "That I would!"

They sent for an ambulance and within five minutes it was there. She was lifted tenderly on to the stretcher and carried into the hall of the slum post, where she was washed and tended. It was found then that the supposed hump on her back was no hump at all, but an illusion, produced by the wearing of ten blouses and much underclothing, to conceal a pitiful state of emaciation. Comforted and cleansed, she was put into the officer's own bed, and gazed around her with the one word "Heaven!" This was on a Saturday, and she lived until the following day, with the officers in constant waiting on her. They spoke to her of Jesus, but she answered that "she was not good enough" for Him, words which prompted them to recite to her the verses of everybody's hymn:

There was no other good enough
To pay the price of sin;
He, only, could unlock the gate
Of Heaven, and let us in.

It was as she was repeating the two last lines, in a voice barely audible, that she died, having previously begged her new-found friends to accept all her worldly possessions—one loaf, one egg, a pinch of sugar and some margarine.

Some facts about her were later brought to light. She was of good family, but a tragedy in her early days had made her strange in manner. Suspicious of friendly overtures, she had repulsed all those who would have helped her, and had lived from hand to mouth, spending the odd coppers she earned in

strange ways, as in the purchase of odds and ends at the Fish Market to give to stray cats. The Slum Secretary's note on the case sums it all up in eight words: "A life in which there was no love."

Now read extracts from two letters sent by an officer at work in the slums of a proud provincial city; and since it is sometimes thought that the worst evils of slumdom are already things of the past, let it be observed that they both bear date in the Year of Our Lord 1930. Here is the first:

I thought I would prowl around, and just make friends where I could. So I entered a yard.

The houses were all broken and empty, but something led me to peep into one of them. I thought at the time it was curiosity, but I knew afterwards that it was God. Huddled up in a corner was a young woman with a wee baby. There was no bed for them, and she was black with bruises.

She had lived with a man who had turned her out after ten years, during which she had borne him nine children. To-day she has died from exposure and inattention at the birth of the baby. The man, since he is not married to her, goes free.

Of course, I am fixing up the children.

And here is the other:

I have just come in from a terrible case—that of a widow with three daughters, aged sixteen, eighteen, and twenty-one.

The eldest, unmarried, has just had her third child, and does not know the father. All three babies are living with the rest of the family in an awful hovel.

The second girl works all day, and goes on the streets at night. She told me that she hated it, but was driven to it by her mother and her elder sister.

The girl of sixteen is also on the streets, but has only been out for two or three nights. I am trying to get her away.

I could not sleep for thinking of them. They had not a rag in which to wrap the new-born child, and all the night through I could hear its mother declaring that she would not go to work, but would start on the streets again as soon as she could get up.

I tried to reason and pray with her. She waited till I

had finished, and then said: "I don't mind coming to your meetings, *but you don't understand. I've never known anything else.*" This, from a young girl, makes my heart bleed. Do pray for us: what can we do unless God comes to our help? I see now why I am here, and how much we have to praise Him for.

The North of England has made large contributions to the Slum Department's book of horrors, though recent revelations have done something to rouse the vigilance of the local authorities. One thinks of a certain Tyneside lane with a shudder of nausea: houses rotten and condemned; every room occupied by a family, and sometimes by more families than one; the doors torn from their hinges to provide the fuel that poverty could not afford, nor charity supply. Rats and vermin everywhere. In one of the rooms twins born, on a bed which, for lack of space elsewhere, jutted across the open doorway between the domains of two households. Grave illness in another, and the body of a dead child stuffed into a box beneath a bed to make room for the living. Yet out of this place, and others in competition with it for misery and wickedness, the officers of the slums have retrieved their jewels.

How wonderfully some of them shine in their new settings! One old lady, for instance, who holds receptions of slum officers and other London friends in her cosy Council flat, and sits in her chair with the grace and assurance of a Duchess. She cannot move from her chair very much, because she is partly paralysed, blind as well, but she is contented to remain in it, remembering that less than two years ago she lay, entirely helpless and alone, in a den that it is not easy to describe without being suspected of wild exaggeration.

Word was taken to the officer in charge of an East End post, that in a court scheduled for demolition under a clearance scheme, there was a blind woman who was ill and apparently had no friends. She went to the court and found a room, roughly eight feet by six, containing only a bed and a small table. The woman, obviously very ill, was lying on a heap of old rags which it was not safe to touch; she was so dirty that it could not with certainty be said whether she was a white woman or a black; at a conservative estimate she had not been washed for six years. It seemed likely that unless she were speedily removed she would not live more than a few days. This was the worst "cleaning up" that the officers, experienced as they were, had ever known. The air was

poisonous; made doubly so by a fire and a window so dirt encrusted that it could not be opened. The walls, even the table, were crawling: battalions of things unclean lurked behind the wall-paper. Blind for ten years and with her legs useless; deserted by the man who should have supported her, but had no use for her in her blindness and paralysis; preyed upon by a parasite of her own sex, who slept of nights in a corner of the room used as a coal-hole; the wretched woman had been suffered to remain in these surroundings and, actually, to rot.

At a time when the district was plastered with warnings by reason of a severe epidemic of small-pox, it was seemingly nobody's business to deal with this plague-spot, more than to give notice that, in course of time, the house would be demolished. No officer of health attempted to purify it meanwhile. That work was left for girls to do. When they had carried their patient out into the yard and washed her—five buckets of hot soda water revealed her as a good-looking woman with a mass of pretty iron-grey hair—the slum officers burned her bed and table and removed her to their own quarters. Then they set about stripping the walls, showers of vermin dropping upon them as they did so. This done, the ensign in command made a call upon certain of the powers that be, and profited by the Briton's right of free speech to an extent which surprised herself and brought a fumigating squad to the court inside of half an hour.

"Mrs. Campbell," from that time forward, was adopted by the slum officers. They washed, papered and painted her room, bought her new clothes and bedding, successfully negotiated for an increase of her blind pension, and obtained an invalid chair in which to wheel her to and from their hall, a mile or more away. Hers was another heart to be "broken by love"; and before long her voice was raised in grateful testimony at the post meetings. Then they approached the L.C.C. and begged a flat for her, shared with the captain's mother.

Standing in a corner of the sitting-room is a pair of crutches: they came to "Mrs. Campbell" in a fashion which most folk would regard as extraordinary. With the passing of the winter, she felt that something of her old bodily strength was returning. "If only I could have some crutches," she said to the captain one day, "I believe I could walk a bit." To the captain it seemed the most natural thing in the world to suggest that they should "pray about it," and not a very

surprising sequel that the crutches should be received within a week. One of the Army's Self-Denial collectors, a special friend of the Slum Department, had been stopped and asked if she had any use for such things.

Among blind women generally, the Slum Department has been able to do a splendid work, owing to the big-hearted generosity of a wealthy man whose name has never once been divulged to the hundreds he has comforted. The tragedy of his own life helped him—as many a man, in God's inscrutable design, has been helped in similar circumstances—to realise the tragedy of others. He, when his mother lost her sight, was able, by the possession of wealth, to alleviate her affliction in a number of ways. But what of those who were blind and poor, blind and unloved, blind and helpless? The cheque which he quietly placed in the Colonel's hand has opened an Aladdin's cave for them. Wireless sets and gramophones, warm clothes and eiderdowns, easy-chairs and wheel-chairs: up and down the country they have been sent to bring light into the lives of the people who walk in darkness.

The gospel which the Salvation Army preaches has been spoken of as the gospel of the "whosoever." But it is also the gospel of the "inasmuch."

At the Children's Court in Glasgow yesterday, a boy of eleven was charged with being drunk and incapable in the street at 11 *a.m. He pleaded "Guilty," and said he got the whisky from friends visiting his parents' house. A police officer found him rolling helplessly about the street. Another officer, sent to question his parents, found them drunk in bed, two drunken women occupying another room.*

At Newcastle yesterday Alfred H . . . was fined £2 for having kept a revolver and ammunition without a certificate. It was stated that his eight-year-old son was carrying a loaded revolver and fired a shot which struck another boy in the thigh. The boy had fifteen spent cartridges and five live ones in his possession.

When a seven-year-old boy was charged at Old Street juvenile police-court yesterday with being beyond the control of his

parents, the father said the child persisted in stealing—generally from his mother.

From one day's issue of *The Times*.

Among the letters bearing postmarks of distant lands which come to the slum commandant in one of the great ports of England is one from a medical missionary doing a noble work in India. Two other correspondents write more or less regularly from Africa and Asia Minor. All three, as lads, passed through her hands while she was stationed at a Scottish post: all three, thanks to her influence and help, have made good. Set down their histories beside the facts from which quotation has been made above and the possibilities of the slum child stand out in high relief. For good or evil they are almost without limit.

It would be difficult to say at what age these children begin to learn. But it is certainly an abnormally early one: Providence has equipped them for the struggle of life with a preternaturally receptive mind and ready wit. Talk with one of them for ten minutes and you are like to run the whole gamut of the emotions. Humour appears to be instinctive with them, as is the power to penetrate a sham: perception and memory are quick and the imitative faculty especially keen. One flash of devastating comment will reduce pomposity to ruins: one phrase of frank illumination turn laughter into tears. It is doubtful which is the more heart-breaking—to listen to a wee girl of four, gravely discussing the problems of feeding and accommodating a family, or to overhear the profanities and obscenities which too often are upon the same lips. Either justifies the slum officers in their continual endeavours to "save the children"; the notable results among the children themselves, and, through them, among their parents, are a sufficient reward.

They start with the babies, whom they have not uncommonly helped to bring into the world. Babies accompany their mothers by the hundred to the Home League meetings, at which the science of infant welfare is among the truths expounded. As they grow up they pass through the Sunday School—dozens of converted pubs are packed two or three times every Sunday, and once or twice a week in addition, with the children of men and women who once spent their time drinking in them. A considerable number (and the sceptic is invited to remember that children age long before their time in the slums) profess conversion at this stage, and where

possible are transferred, as adult converts are, to the Army's "field" corps. Various means have been devised to keep a hold on those who remain, in the difficult years between childhood and adolescence. Mouth organ and jazzophone bands are among them, and some of these are astonishingly good.

Incidentally, one of the London slum posts has produced an infant prodigy, in the person of a girl conductor, not yet in her 'teens She is the "little mother" of a large family, ranging from a baby to a lad of fifteen; and she first made herself known to the post by an irruption on a Sunday afternoon, after one of her several brothers had been ejected for disorderly conduct. Red in the face, defiant and wrathful, all her thin body menacing violence, she hailed the officer in charge.

"Hi! Cap'n! Wotcher mean by puttin' our 'Arold out o' the meetin'? *I want ter know.*"

And Cap'n loved her. Sarah suffered herself to be appeased, and began to attend the meetings herself, bossing the elders and mothering the "tinies" after the manner of her kind. When a mouth-organ band was formed among the boys, and none of its members proved equal to assuming the conductorship, Sarah promptly offered to step into the breach. There were mutterings at this among the misogynists; mutterings that turned to mutiny after Sarah had given her band the sharp edge of her tongue for failure to soar to her fastidious standards. "Don't want no girls," said the mouth-organists. "They don't know nothing about music, anyway." In this mood, and under protest, they attended a big meeting as one of the turns on the programme. There was a swell brass band in attendance, and the conductor, who had been told about Sarah, asked her by way of jest if she thought she could put his musicians through their paces. Sarah not only thought she could: she did it. They hoisted her on to a chair and gave her the baton: the band like heroes rose to the occasion. She dashed her untidy locks aside with the gesture of a Sir Henry Wood, rapped out a summons on the chair back, and *crash!*—everyone's toes were tapping the beats of a swinging march, while her own mutineers looked on in wide-mouthed admiration. After that her position was never contested.

Something more than mouth-organ bands is wanted, however, if the growing boys and girls are to be held. And there is so much that might easily be done, given the helpers only. Wholesome recreation and some kind of educational programme would meet with an eager welcome, and would be of

incalculable value. It is good to know that the need has been realised by the Slum Department, and that measures to meet it are under contemplation; but if they are to be effectively proportioned, a really big effort in the direction of personal service will be necessary. The framework of the machinery is there—in theory there is a slum brigade to every post—but human cogs in plenty must be mounted in their places before the wheels will properly revolve.

To understand the children it is essential to know the circumstances in which they live. That is why the patronising outsider, for whom they have no use, so lamentably fails to capture their attention. If you would know why they are restless; if you would have patience with their fidgets, you must be acquainted with the physical repressions of their homes. Try to picture to yourself this household:

> Mrs. S. Seventeen children, fifteen of them living. Eight at school, four under school age, three at work. Entire household living in two small rooms. At mealtimes some sit on the floor and three under the table. At night they are divided into two parties. Six of them, including the father and mother, sleep in one bed—three at the top and three at the bottom. Each of the children has four names.

The report comes from the officer in charge of one of the Army's seaside homes, to which the mother and the youngest child had been sent for a holiday. They were "so glad to be able to stretch their legs," she says. Nor is it difficult to believe it. Even sardines are not expected to sleep much more than six in a bed, and they, as a rule, have only one name apiece. "There's five sleep in our bed," said a boy to an officer in Hackney. "We ain't got a chance to grow."

It is easy to win the affection of a slum child if one remembers that there are tragically few to bid for it. It was a five-year-old boy in Liverpool who told a visitor that he liked coming to the slum post "'cos they loves a chap"; and it was the same candid babe who, having presented a badly-cut foot to the officer for repair, observed: "'Twasn't no use going to muvver; she wouldn't care." There is a hunger of the heart that is every bit as bad as stomach hunger and far harder to satisfy. These children know it well, and they quickly get to realise that the love for which their stunted souls cry out is at the back of that undefined difference which

makes the slum post so attractive to them. Then it is that their natures break into flower, and strangely beautiful the blossoming can be. But it is a beauty, for the most part, with an ache in it.

Recognising a difference, they long to be different too, and there is a terrible earnestness—terrible because of all that it implies of evil knowledge—about some of the prayers that are sobbed out to the children's Saviour. The officer who knelt beside one little penitent felt her own heart near to bursting when she heard the child paraphrasing the only petition she had ever been taught:

> Gentle Jesus, meek and mild,
> Look upon a drunkard's child.

In this case, by the way, the drunken father was himself converted shortly afterwards.

The sincerity of many child converts and the reality of the change in them cannot be called in question. Sometimes, however, the *naïveté* with which they offer proof of them is a little disconcerting. There was a boy who dashed breathlessly into the post one morning, on his way to school, with the shout: "See, Captain! I'm keeping saved. I've washed my neck this morning!"

Of the children who have "kept saved," a classic example was Joey. He showed the stuff he was made of at an outing for the juniors—this was nearly twenty years ago—when, because he was converted, he begged that he might be given charge of the flag. The officer, urging upon him that he must not leave it, granted his request and busied herself preparing food. While she was thus engaged a heavy thunderstorm broke, but she took no special heed of it till somebody begged her to bring in one of her boys, who was still outside in the rain. She found Joey defying the lightning: he had taken his coat off and wrapped it round the colours. Joey, a sailor Salvationist, went down with Kitchener on the *Hampshire*.

In passing, let it be said that striking changes are frequently wrought in some of the wildest and roughest children merely by contact with the softening influences of the slum post, and without any profession of religion. There was a shock-headed lad in a seaside town, for instance, who used to be the terror of the slum hall congregation. The breaking up of a meeting was the chief of his delights; but the unwearying

patience of the commandant, and the gentle manner of her reproofs shamed him so thoroughly at last that he constituted himself her special protector, and once, when the meeting was being disturbed by a drunken woman, made a spectacular *début* as guardian of the peace, departing with the offender kicking in his sturdy arms. That the commandant might not be offended by his appearance, he washed himself till he shone, wore a high collar and a still higher pair of trousers (they reached to his armpits, serving for waistcoat as well), and at one single application emptied an entire bottle of oil upon his hair. In this new guise he presented himself at a meeting, in the course of which reference was casually made to the want of funds. Charlie stopped the proceedings and intimated that money would presently be forthcoming, after which he left abruptly, to return soon after the meeting closed, rather redder in the face than usual, but with the sum of one shilling and ninepence in his hand for the commandant's coffers. She, dear soul, was chary of acceptance, having doubts both grave and natural regarding its origin—doubts which the donor's obstinate silence did nothing to allay. But somebody ascertained that Charlie, in fact, had raised his money and his temperature by turning somersaults outside the pier gates at a penny a time, which, as somebody else said, was a legitimate, if roundabout, way of doing it.

The fresh faith of the child believer is a tonic for the sophisticated. It is the faith that can, and does, move mountains—mountains in respect of which the slums are a very Switzerland. To "believe for" a thing, whether for an urgent material need or for the spiritual transformation of some dark home, is very often, with these boys and girls, to see that thing accomplished: it would, indeed, be easy, and at the same time extraordinarily impressive, to keep a tabulated record at each slum post of all that faith and faithfulness have done, through and among the children.

One small lad—roughest of diamonds, but a diamond none the less—"believed for" a pair of boots. His own were so worn as to be almost non-existent, and his mother, with no money to buy new ones, had been carrying him to and from school rather than let him walk through the damp streets. He seemed to be getting heavier every day, and one evening she crumpled up and cried, because she was afraid she would be able to carry him no longer. Alfie puckered up his forehead and looked grave. "I'll have to tell Jesus about it," he said.

His mother, half awed and half amused, listened while he put the matter, in plain, straightforward language, before his Friend:

"Dear Jesus," she heard him say, "you send other little boys shoes and things to wear: please send some to me."

Alfie had his supper and went to bed; there was a knock at the door. It was a neighbour with a pair of boots which were getting too small for her own son, but would do for Alfie splendidly. Mother tip-toed back to Alfie's bedside, and because he was asleep she laid the boots beside him on his pillow. His shout awakened her in the morning. "Mother! they've come!" he cried. "He knew my size, too. *And there's no hole in the ceiling.*"

It "laughs at impossibilities," this faith, and no one need wonder that it bears its fruit among the parents and the older people generally. Coming in practical touch with it, they tend to believe as children likewise, and with the same results. Mrs. Mills, of the Borough, can tell you something about this: she told it jubilantly at a week-night meeting by way of testimony.

She was a new convert, and she had a tough testing. How could it be otherwise, when her husband and elder son were out of work and five of them had to live and sleep in one room, she and the man, with a lad of twelve, in one bed, and the remaining two, a youth of twenty and a girl of twenty-two, sharing the other? For a month she had "kept saved," but it had been a case of conquering from day to day, and now she had come to a crisis. It was a grey morning of hopelessness; no food in the house and no money to buy any; a hungry boy wanting his breakfast, and a girl coming home from the factory at one o'clock to clamour for dinner and certainly to make trouble if she had to go without it. Was it possible that God, busy as He must be, could bother His head about her? Could He even know about her? Well, it had seemed as if He did: she would try Him once again. She knelt on the floor, and as she began to pray a man put his head in at the door.

"Your boy at home?" he asked. "Got a hand-cart job for him if he is."

She ran and fetched him, telling him that this was a job that God Himself had sent. When he had gone, she remembered that she had not asked how long he was likely to be. That dinner must be ready by one. Down on her knees she

went again, this time to ask that the boy might be back "by half-past twelve, at latest, please." And at half-past twelve she heard his voice: "Hullo, mum! Here's two bob."

With a deepening industrial depression, which has broken the faith of thousands but has yet thrown numbers back upon hope in God, it has seemed to many people as if the children were being made the special vehicle of evangelising power. Up in the North particularly, and in South Wales, one hears of ways in which their influence tells—of how they bring their parents to the slum post meetings, and even lead them to the penitent form. It should give pause to shallow thinkers that the Gospel story has in no respect weakened its hold upon the child mind, but rather seems to gain in its attractiveness. Every slum post in the British Isles could do with at least twice its present Sunday School accommodation.

This, perhaps, is surprising, but not more surprising than the extent of virgin soil which still awaits the sowing of religious seed where children are concerned. In one of the most crowded districts of South-East London, and one whose streets are plenteously sprinkled with mission halls of various kinds, a slum post opened in 1929 had over 150 children on its books within three months, not one of whom had previously attended a place of worship. They are discovered largely by house-to-house enquiry, and sometimes the questions asked bring unexpected answers. A commandant's call at one house, for example, fetched to the door a care-worn maiden of seven, having in her keeping an extremely shop-soiled male infant. The two were alone, and the sympathetic commandant sat down and talked to them. Parenthetically to one of her remarks she said, "You know who Jesus is, of course."

"Sure I don't," said the little girl.

"But you've heard about Heaven, haven't you?" asked the officer.

"Sure I haven't," said the little girl. She wasn't overconversational.

The visitor amended her talk accordingly, and began to draw a verbal picture of Heaven, a beautiful place where there would be no sin and no dirt. Her listener cut her short.

"Then it won't do for *him*," she said decisively, pointing over her shoulder with a back-turned thumb. "He can't keep clean for five minutes together."

In Sunshine Lodge, the Kentish country home which the Army fills with slum children all through the months of

summer, the officer found another child who had never heard of Jesus. When the best dinner of his short but hungry life was placed within his reach, it seemed to him a waste of useful time to stop and sing something that was called "grace." So the theory of the thing had to be carefully explained to him. Nobody guessed how deeply he took it in, but there were strange happenings when he returned to London.

First of all his father knocked him down because he stood and sang grace at the humble family board. "Don't want none of that —— nonsense here," said father. Then, as he stuck to his guns and did the same thing next day, he was clouted by his elder brother. "Don't be a —— young fool," said elder brother, taking a leaf out of father's loose-leaf book. And on the third day, when he stood once more to his feet prepared for the worst, father turned his attention to elder brother who had his fist raised, and walloped him instead. "Leave the kid alone! he's a —— sight pluckier than you are," said father. The officer learned afterwards that the talk at Sunshine Lodge had been well worth while, since a child's witness led to a mother's conversion.

New doors, at times, are opened by calamity; doors that have hitherto been closed to the slum officers or held grudgingly ajar. There is no concealment then, no veil upon the ugly things that childhood must endure in vicious homes. Once, in the living-quarters of a northern slum post, the lieutenant sat writing while a girl of six stood at the window, watching the splashing of the rain in the squalid courtyard below. Suddenly the lieutenant became aware that the little one was quietly crying. She asked the reason.

"Oh, how I wish, how I do wish," came the sobbing reply, "that I was ensign's little girl."

Ensign, at that moment, was out in the town arranging for the funeral of the child's mother. The father, a drunken brute, holding a home in terror, had planned to take her, now that his wife was dead, into surroundings that will not bear thinking about, but the coming of the officers had prevented it. They had taken her to the post, and there she had heard them talking of how she might best be placed in safety. For two days she had been "ensign's little girl," loved and petted and cared for: now she must go to the workhouse—and she understood. Poor little tragic six-year-old! Perhaps there were many, in this kindly land, who would gladly have given you refuge—if they had only known. Perhaps the very telling of your tears may help to wipe away the tears of another.

What power of suggestion there is, latent within the simple sentences that come from the heart of a child. They stand out upon the pages of a note-book like vignettes in an album; some pitiful, some lovely, some quaint, but all appealing. Look at this closing group:

Spoken by a boy of twelve (one of five motherless children whose father had just cut his throat), when the officer kissed him:

"What was that?" Then, putting his hand to his cheek and following her to the door, "Will you do it again, please?"

By a little girl, pulling at the doctor's coat on the morning after a slum officer's visit:

"Won't you come back and kneel down with me, to ask Jesus to make my mammy better?"

By a small boy, ill in a miserable home, when told by the doctor that he was getting better:

"It's the Army brorf what's making me well, isn't it, doctor?"

But best, the remark of a child who ran across the street to stop an officer, a week or so after her mother had knelt at the slum post penitent-form:

"I don't know what you've done to my mummy, captain, but she's making us all so happy now."

GOD IN THE SLUMS CHAP. X

ONCE on a time the slum folk knew no holiday. There was, to be sure, the annual carnival of hop-picking; but this (apart from the fact that hop-picking is hard work, if healthy) is mainly an affair for Londoners, and slum dwellers elsewhere get no benefit from it unless they live within reach of Kent or Worcestershire.

To-day it is different—not different enough, but different.

Holiday funds for poor districts are yearly raised by the denominational clergy; the popular press, in an astonishing degree, has cultivated and directed the generosity of its legions of readers; and the Salvation Army, co-operating with all in a work removed by its nature from sectarian prejudice, is able annually to provide holidays of one kind or another for a great and growing number of slum mothers and children.

The story of its seaside homes at Herne Bay and Tankerton is a romance in itself—a romance of private beneficence, open-handed and unadvertised, translated into the realm of the practical by faith and far-sightedness. To hear from the Slum Secretary of the extraordinary manner in which these and kindred efforts have been financed is to be reminded that miracles are still being wrought by the power of obstinate belief. The average hearer gasps, indeed, when told how, time and again, money and other gifts, earmarked for the specific purpose, have come to hand as the immediate sequel to prayer for them. To him, it sounds a tall thing to obtain a motor charabanc by such means, rather than through the conventional channels, yet it has been done, and done at least twice. When Resthaven, the beautiful home at Herne Bay, began to extend its accommodation, the problem of transport, every week and all the year round, became acute. Railway fares were prohibitive, and there was no fund sufficient to meet the cost of a road contract. To equip the Slum Department with its own road transport seemed to be the only solution, and even for this no capital was available. So the Slum Department prayed for a charabanc, and at once there came the gift of one from an outside friend. This is faith of a kind which giants of past centuries, like George Müller, of Bristol, practised as part of their everyday life: it has gone sadly out of fashion in an age whose preference is for the wonders of the machine-shop and the laboratory.

Resthaven, well-named, is a home for tired women; the Anna Wilson home at Tankerton, poised on the brink of the sea, is for mothers and children; Sunshine Lodge, at Yalding, in the Weald of Kent, is for boys, with an occasional exception when girls dislodge them. In addition, parties are sent for a week or a fortnight to other places on the coast or in the country, and there are numerous day excursions. Slum officers are detailed to accompany all the parties, and are in residence at every home.

To understand all that the holidays mean to the Army's humble guests is not as easy as it sounds. Send a child to the

country from the slums of Bethnal Green, and the imagination pictures her, or him, caught in the magic of the meadows, and lingering far into the summer twilight to gather treasure from the hedgerows. It does not take into account the possibility that she may be so enchanted with the sole possession of a snow-white bed as to want to stay in it day and night. Yet this is precisely what has been known to happen.

"I lay in bed and here the little organ play and captain sings hymns and she sings very beautiful."

That is the kernel of a typical letter sent from Sunshine Lodge. What sort of contrast, one wonders, was in its writer's mind, as the sounds of the little organ floated up to her in the quiet dormitory?

It is the same with the grown-ups. Many of those who travel by that heaven-sent charabanc have never seen the sea before. But bright paint and spotless table linen are equally new to them, and sleeping in separate bedrooms a tremendous adventure.

One for whom the prospect of "a good lie in bed" had not the same attraction as for the majority was an old maiden lady who, hearing of Herne Bay's wonders, set out to beg from her local slum post the first holiday she had had in eighteen years, for seventeen of which she had been bedridden. She arrived at the post wearing a nightdress and two men's coats—all the clothing she possessed—and she had been three hours on the way. Needless to say, her dream was realised, and she was so excited that, rather than take the risk of being late for the start of the journey, she sat up all night. She, like most of the other women, had been wholly dependent on parish relief for her existence. Fancy going for a holiday without so much as the money to stamp a postcard, or (as in one instance) in clothes that had seen continuous service for eleven years. To have brought rest, good food, pure air and kind words into lives of such bleakness as this must be a rare reward to the unassuming lady and gentleman whose names, as Resthaven's donors, are hung above the fireplace in its spacious lounge.

There is nothing of the institution about any of the homes, and nothing in their atmosphere that is either oppressive or repressive. Their occupants may worship where they please. *Apropos* of which there is a pleasant tale to tell concerning a party of small boys who spent an Eastertide at Yalding. They

went on Sunday morning to the Baptist Church and sat in a body at the back of it. The minister announced a hymn: up went half a dozen hands, and half a dozen voices piped in protest:

"Please, sir, we don't know that one."

"Well, now, that's a pity," said the parson. "Never mind; let's have one you do know. What shall it be?" And, more or less in unison, all the little boys conspired to make the building echo with a rousing Army song.

One of the boys, by the way, was Ginger, who got himself sensationally into the newspapers. To the mind of Ginger (very active beneath its red thatch) Bermondsey and bread-and-marge, after Yalding and steak pudding, made an unendurable anti-climax. He therefore adopted the policy of "back to the land," and carried it into effect with the help of a scooter (borrowed from an unknowing elder brother), on which, in the wake of the slum charabanc, outward bound from the Elephant, he vanished into the void, or, at least, into the New Kent Road. Whether Ginger did, actually and in fact, scoot the whole of the thirty-five miles, or whether he got a tow on the voyage, is not quite clear; all that is certain is that he scooted up to Sunshine Lodge long after the sun had done shining for that day, fell inside the door with a glad chirrup, and went to sleep. The rest of the acts of Ginger, how he secured an extra holiday but made an inglorious return therefrom at the behest of the school attendance officer; how he was paraded for punishment by a schoolmaster who knew not Yalding, and how the adjutant encamped about that place of learning until she won the pedagogic pardon, are they not written in the books of the Abbey Street post? Despite the manner of its ending, Ginger's joy-ride was not a lost endeavour: Sunshine Lodge reaped benefit from the publicity, and other heads, ginger and black and straw-coloured, were helped to slumber on its pillows that might not else have nestled there.

When early autumn comes, Sunshine Lodge changes its purpose and becomes an advanced base for the Army's operations in the hop-fields. For three or four weeks in September the London slum posts are virtually high and dry. The human tide recedes from them, to surge instead through the rich garden lands that lie to the south of Maidstone—at Beltring and the Peckhams, Hunton and Benover and Marden, Goudhurst and Cranbrook and Horsmonden. Scores of thousands migrate to these districts each year from the slums,

and the slum officers, leaving their keys with temporary helpers, go before them, camping in their midst to run canteens, crêches, first-aid centres, and all the machinery of practical religion to which they are accustomed. It is superhuman toil, performed amid sub-human conditions.

If the picking of the hops lasted three months instead of three weeks, the scandal of the hop-fields would be physically impossible. Epidemics would ravage the camps, and the countryside would rise against the drunken debauchery to which its peaceful villages must now submit. As things are, the general attitude is that of the rider who puts his head down and plunges into the storm: it may be an inferno while it lasts, but it will soon be over.

That it is an inferno, nobody who has spent a week-end in one of the hopping centres will dispute. It was bad enough in the old days of hoppers' trains and horse-drawn vehicles, when access from London was relatively difficult; but the era of the car and the motor-coach has made it infinitely worse. All day Saturday and Sunday the roads are chock-a-block with motors, lorries and "lizzies" and charabancs, laden to the limit with visiting parties whose luggage consists for the most part of whisky bottles and crates of beer. The country police are powerless to control the invaders; they storm the public-houses and turn the night into a riot. Farmers must mount guard over their property, shopkeepers barricade their windows, even the ministers sometimes close their churches and wait afar off for October's calm. The cottage hospitals and the bigger institutions of the neighbouring towns are kept at their busiest, for the hoppers' huts are the breeding places of all manner of infection, and the home-going cars and wagons, steered by unsteady hands, take their toll carelessly in the dark Kentish lanes.

In the thick of it you may be sure of finding the slum officers. Is there a fight?—they will be there to stop it. Is there a fire?—they will be there to put it out. Is there fever?—they will be there to nurse and disinfect. Is there a roadside smash?—their first-aid knowledge will have been applied long ere the motor ambulance has breasted the adverse current of the traffic. How these girls work! They are up with the sun to furnish breakfasts from their canteens. They are filling their crêches with babies while Londoners are still rubbing the sleep out of their eyes. They are around visiting, in huts and gardens, all through the warm morning and the lazy afternoon, and filling in time by bathing the infant population.

Enormously popular are the slum officers' hot baths at a penny per head if you've got it, and never-mind-sonny-here's-a-ticket-if-you-haven't. Bear in mind that the water has to be carried in cans from a supply point; that it has to be heated in a field boiler which burns wood and needs eternal stoking; that the bathing is done either in tents or in poky wooden buildings; that the need of it is evident and urgent; that the air is hot and steamy, and that two lieutenants have bathed as many as ninety-eight children in a single Saturday morning; and you will agree that the charge is not extortionate. The hoppers do their cooking gipsy fashion, so there are burns a-plenty to be dressed; alfresco feeding is a lure to myriads of wasps and mosquitoes, so there is a steady procession of walking wounded, loudly beseeching to be treated by blue-bag, ammonia bottle, soda, or Spanish onion. The travelling canteens will be busy about tea-time, and as the evening draws on there will be meetings beneath the open sky, with sing-songs for the children. In every camp you may hear them singing the choruses that captain teaches. See, there she is, kneeling on the parched grass, bare-headed and buff-overalled, with a concertina in her hands, or maybe a violin, playing over the music and making the circle of youngsters repeat the words. Listen:

> God is with us, all the time.
> In the morning, when joy-bells chime;
> In the evening, when lights are low;
> Our God is with us, everywhere we go.

They call that the hop-fields anthem. It has no particular merit, poetic or musical, but it is a hot favourite with old as well as young, and often it gains a certain beauty, both from the surroundings and from the singing.

It is difficult, however, not to feel the jarring incongruity of the words when one considers the detail of the average hop-field camp. With a few notable exceptions, as at Beltring, the pickers are housed like animals. As a rule, they bring with them their entire households and all their household goods; and these are crowded into a hut which is, ordinarily, a single compartment of wood or stone, without windows, fitments, or furnishings. Six or more people of both sexes may live in a hut, sleeping together on the straw which the farmer is required to provide, or on mattresses they have brought with them. Occasionally there is a family bedstead—a visitor to a

camp near Goudhurst was shown a canopied affair which filled every inch of available space and was occupied at night by a woman, her daughter and son-in-law, and three children. The heat was stifling, despite the open door, but the bed was covered with an ornate eiderdown, beneath which, as the visitor talked with the younger woman, a vague form tossed uneasily.

"Surely your mother is not in bed on an afternoon like this?" said the caller. "Is she ill?"

"That ain't mother," answered the woman, laughing. "That's Bob." And Bob was presented, the eiderdown being thrown back for the purpose. He was a large and lively Airedale.

It goes without saying that there is no privacy. Everything makes for horrible promiscuities and moral dangers. Other dangers are present, too, especially that of fire. If the weather is dry, it is easy to start a blaze, and never a season passes without fatality. An overturned candle in a padlocked hut, a scream and a gathering glare. And while neglectful parents are drinking themselves silly in the public-house, a mile away, a roaring tongue of yellow flame is running before the wind down the long row of shacks. All that will greet them on their fuddled return will be ashes, charred beams, and, perhaps, three or four small shapes, contorted, unrecognisable. . . . No, not all, for the slum officers will be there, comforting, bandaging, serving out apparel and arranging temporary shelter. You will hear of the speed with which they wiped out the distance from Yalding, clinging desperately to their seats in the swaying "battery," as it raced through the dusty by-ways, with a red point of fire, pricked out on the darkness, to serve for guiding star. More than once, when alarm of fire has been given, the battery crews have been on the spot so quickly that they have been able to play the part of fire brigade.

For that matter, they stand ready for any emergency, and at any hour. Towards midnight one Sunday, the solitary village policeman knocked up the hop-field headquarters with an S.O.S. from London. A lad was dying in Woolwich; his parents were hopping at Hunton; could the Army discover them and send them home at once? The driver who rose from bed to take the message had only just turned in after fourteen hours of strenuous field transport work. It was a dark night and raining; Hunton is three miles away, and the camp was already fast asleep. To find two people among a community

of some hundreds was not going to be easy. But he brought his car out all the same and found them; drove them, moreover, thirty miles to London, so that they saw their son before he died, and then went back to report for duty in the morning as usual.

Hopping without the Army, in short, would almost be unthinkable. The roughest and the vilest respect it; the traffic obeys its signals; the publican sighs with relief when its stentorian opposition outside silences the disorder in his bar-room. Its presence stems the licence of the week-ends when every other restraint is in danger of being swept aside. The circle of its open-air worship is never broken, and on Saturday nights and Sundays, when it is reinforced by London bandsmen with their glittering instruments of war, the drunks and semi-drunks will press around it, joining in the singing, baring their heads during prayer, and now and then, in individual cases, kneeling in sudden soberness to pray for themselves at the drum-head. This is the Salvation Army of the Hallelujah days; fearless, rejoicing, uncompromising; the Army of Whitechapel and the Mile-End Waste, at grips with elemental passion in the dust and mud of the highway.

Perhaps it is because of the extent to which the elemental holds sway in the hop-fields that memories of them are so vivid. The smell of wood smoke, damp earth, and drying grass, the sharp aroma of a Bermondsey hop warehouse, a Cockney jest, or any other of a dozen common things is sufficient to awaken all that the mind retains of weeks close filled with incident. At a bidding of familiar words there comes a vision of the rising land below Goudhurst, spread out in the powdery blue dusk, with the hard outlines of the hoppers' huts softened in the faded light of a late September evening. Clustered around a leaping blaze, their faces ruddy in its grateful glow, are some scores of children and their elders, listening to a bed-time story told by a slum captain with the face of a Flemish Madonna and a mass of golden-brown hair.

"And now," she says, "it's time for boys and girls to go to sleep, and this time to-morrow you'll be back in London. We'll just have one more chorus, and then lieutenant will ask a blessing. Come along, now, all of you! Grown-ups as well!"

She raises her hand and starts them singing with her own clear voice. The children first, and then the bigger folk, take up the melody, and as it gathers volume the dwellers in the further huts stand silhouetted in their doorways and join in:

"God is with us all the time.
In the morning, when joy-bells chime;
In the evening, when lights are low;
Our God is with us, everywhere we go."

The last notes die away, the camp fires brighten in the fast-falling darkness and the lieutenant speaks. For peace, and grace, and Heaven's richest blessing, for journeying mercies on the morrow, she prays to God whose eyes are the stars and whose breath the soft night wind. It is the last time she will pray in that place. Another hopping season is over.

"'Night, cap'n! 'Night, leff!"

"Good night, everybody. God bless you." The eyes of both are glistening.

It is very quiet, now.

GOD IN THE SLUMS CHAP. XI

GOD in the slums! All that has gone before has failed in its one purpose if it has failed to justify that title.

It would be entirely to misrepresent the slum campaign were one to depict it from the social angle and leave it at that. Its end, its origin, its strength are purely spiritual. All that the slum officer is, all that she knows, does and hopes for, is bent to a single end—the winning of souls. She is a gallant figure in emergency, a never-failing friend in need, constant in service and in counsel; but on the platform of her little hall, or in the ring of her open-air meeting, she is something greater—an apostle, a prophetess of the Word. There is a power in her ministry which compels and quickens, and because of it there are outpourings of the Spirit on congregations of the poor and humble which live in the memory long after the ritual worship of the temple, with its pomp and pageantry, have been forgotten.

Were it not so, there would be nothing to draw the people to her meetings; nothing to make it urgent for her, as a matter of house-room alone, to pass on converts to the field corps, so that new-comers need not be crowded out. For the halls are poor, and there are no extraneous aids to give the service ornament; no choir, no band or organ, a cracked harmonium or a concertina maybe, but more than likely nothing at all to

lead and guide the singing. The benches are bare and hard, the lighting often inadequate, and the ventilation generally more so, if only for the reason that the outside world is much too rich in sounds and smells to permit of open windows. With a fried-fish shop next door, and the cobbled street roaring and quaking at the passage of trams and buses, there is neither sanctuary stillness nor odour of sanctity.

Yet from twenty to fifty people will sit without sign of restiveness through two full hours of prayer and song, testimony and exhortation, and will consider themselves hard done by if the proceedings should be curtailed to any great extent. The prayers are rambling and roughly phrased, the testimonies short and staccato; but they are real with faith and experience, and the hopes of those who utter them are centred in the meeting's last half-hour—a battle of prayer, with the enemy under concentrated fire and wounded souls surrendering at the penitent-form. It is important to realise, when weighing reports which read like the presage of a genuine revival, that the apparatus of emotion is completely absent from the slum post meetings, or, at any rate, from those which are held within doors. The poor have the Gospel preached to them, and, in its native purity, the power of the Gospel is unabated.

To some extent it is different when the slum officers carry the fight boldly into enemy territory with their street services, and their "bombardments" outside—and even inside—the public-houses. Emotion is certainly present then, sometimes to help, sometimes to hinder. But spiritual power is present also, no matter what the environment, and it is manifested in extraordinary ways.

Three such occasions may be cited, which have a claim to special recollection. The first, a hopping incident of 1928, was a meeting, held upon impulse, in the packed bar-parlour of a country inn. It was the night of a brilliantly fine Saturday, and the villages were thronged with pickers and their friends. The noise was deafening; traffic threaded its way with collisions and cursing through streets encumbered with stalls and barrows for the sale of jellied eels and other delicacies beloved of the Cockney on holiday; and jazz-tortured melody was blasted into the sky from the steam organs of merry-go-rounds and fair booths. There was an inn which had gained a particularly bad reputation for drunkenness and disorder, and the Army had made it the target of its principal attack. But even the band from London was unequal to the assault, and no

single human voice could make itself heard at a distance of more than a yard or two.

The house was full to the doors; beer and spirits were being served from its windows to the crowd outside, many of whom were already drunk. Let it be conceded that the publican may well have been acting in self-defence as much as in defiance of the law, for it is a fair assumption that, if he had attempted to withhold liquor from those who should not have been served with it, the place would have been pulled down about his ears. The constable was out of sight: in any case he could have done nothing.

Something called by courtesy a dance was in progress in the sanded parlour. It was a beastly thing to watch, for all the participants were women, and the measure was a drunken break-down, performed in a sort of frenzy, with the eyes of the dancers fixed and glassy, their breath coming in gasps, and the sweat pouring down their faces as they stamped and clapped their hands to mark the rhythm. There was no indication that they derived pleasure from the performance; nothing even remotely suggestive of the healthy mirthfulness with which, perhaps, the villagers of a more innocent century twined ribbons round the maypole within sight of those very windows. On the contrary, they danced like savages under the lash: it was devil dancing.

Without warning, into the midst of it there walked a woman Salvationist, with half a dozen others following her. It was the Colonel, leading her picked troops into action. As the meeting languished in the impossibility of hearing anything that was said, she had quietly gone about its circumference and tapped her chosen ones upon the shoulder. Quite unrehearsed, the move took everyone by surprise, and nobody more than the occupants of the inn. The dance stopped abruptly, the singing and shouting, and the clatter at the bar, faded into silence, even in the street there was a lull. A girl's voice arose, singing a verse that William Booth loved:

Have you any room for Jesus?
He who bore your load of sin.
As he knocks and asks admission,
Sinner, will you let him in?

Unsteadily, a man made his way down the length of the bar-parlour, carrying in his hand a heavy glass mug full of beer. He began to swing it, and one who had followed the

Colonel in marked him down, ready for a spring. But the man with the mug meant no mischief. Dazed as he was with drink, something within him was answering the summons of the familiar song, something that roused an uncouth sense of chivalry. His swinging arm should keep the circle clear: he would see to it that there was no interference.

"'Sall right, lady," he assured the Colonel, thickly. "Me for tharmy. I love tharmy. Gawblesstharmy." And the Colonel shook his free hand with an engaging smile and said: "Thank you, friend."

She and her officers held the floor for more than half an hour, and held their audience as well. The men instinctively took off their caps: they, like the women, listened to her unaffected talk, and if some of them drank while they did so, the most refrained. There was just one doubtful moment, when it seemed as if they were getting impatient. The leader noticed the symptoms and made a sign to the little party: at once they went on their knees in the sand and sawdust—and two of the women who had danced went with them. There they remained while everybody, drunk or sober, joined in the singing of "Rock of Ages" and heard the benediction with head bowed.

Those who will may scoff at an evangelism which adopts these tactics, as they may scoff at the tears of a drunken woman; but it is not for them to pronounce the failure of the one or the futility of the other. Nobody can know all that was accomplished by the witness of that bar-parlour meeting; but if it did no more than stir a memory and keep alive a sense of shame it was well worth while.

The second of these memories is that of a street in Nottingham, not ten minutes removed from that in which the Army's founder was born. It was for long a place of more than ordinarily ill repute, bad for the health of law-abiding citizens, and inclined to be proud of the fact that police constables preferred to visit it in twos and threes. Every Thursday evening the two girl officers from the slum post, unattended, called on the inmates of its lodging-houses: every Saturday night, at the hour when the public-houses close, they held a meeting for the drunks. Always there might be found around that ring a handful of the city's worst characters. Out of the misty gloom and into the beams of the incandescent street lamp would come livid faces which were never forgotten by those who saw them. There was one such, years ago, a woman's face, once beautiful and still retaining

its finely chiselled lines, but hard beyond description. She wept without sound or movement when they were singing "Jesu, lover of my soul"—the crowd always chose their own hymns and they seldom omitted that one—and even the tears on her cheeks looked hard—hard as diamonds and cold as ice. . . .

But on the night with which the present tale is concerned it was a man who attracted attention. He was drunk, but not so drunk as to disguise the fact that he had personality and more than the usual amount of intelligence. He interrupted the captain's talk with the remark "God can't save an atheist," and although he listened well enough to her reply, he came back stolidly, time after time, to the same proposition.

The meeting became noisy, as it frequently did: the captain saw that a couple of policemen were standing behind him. For some reason which she could not define she felt strangely anxious that he should not be arrested, so she left the ring for a moment and attempted to reason with him, telling the constables that they might safely leave him to her. The most she could persuade him to do, however, was to go away quietly, but before he went she tore a slip of paper from her note-book, pencilled upon it her address and the words "God bless you," and slipped it in his pocket. She little dreamed that by that action she prevented a serious crime.

He knocked at her door next morning, sober and puzzled, with the paper in his hand. "I want you to tell me what this means," he said, "for I imagine that you put it in my pocket, though I don't know how or where." Briefly, the captain told him how things had fallen out.

"And so you saved me from the police," he commented. "Well, listen." And then he made confession. He was a much-wanted criminal, specialising in jewel robbery and trick thefts. On the night of the meeting he was to have planned the details of a new *coup* with other members of his gang. He had come to Nottingham for the purpose—but he had got drunk instead and in his intoxication he had wandered the streets till brought up short by the Army's open-air stand. He had vaguely imagined himself an atheist, without realising that by his favourite dictum alone he was disproving it, and now he knew that he was wrong about God and about himself. He saw God's hand in the captain's slip of paper, and it changed his life from that hour. His was a definite conversion.

So small a thing once more, and yet so big an outcome. It was the same once with a slum ensign in South London, who

was moved to pity by the sight of a tramp shivering outside the door of her hall on a bitterly cold night of winter. He was a giant of a man, standing six feet three in his boots—they looked more like sandals in their toelessness—and it was not easy for her to reach up to him; but she took the scarf from her own neck and wrapped it around his. That loving deed won him as effectively as a blessing scribbled on a slip of paper won the jewel thief. He turned out to be the grandson of a man who held high rank in the British Army, and he owed his want and degradation to a drunken father. Soon he was testifying before his old companions that "he had everything in the world he could want."

A back street of Cardiff frames the third picture. There is something about these streets—you may find the same thing in certain other towns, notably in Greenock—which oppresses one with an eerie sense of active malevolence, and they had been the scene of a revolting crime only an hour before the slum officers opened their Saturday night bombardment. As a consequence, there was an unusually large crowd, mostly sympathetic, but in part murmuring and inimical, for the district is rich in Catholics and Communists, and the tide of feeling generally runs high. While the meeting proceeded, the public-houses were disgorging their customers, and from every group of them individuals were drawn into the ring as driftwood is drawn to a vortex. With some the officers spoke, and presently, during the singing, a youth stepped out bravely, after a moment's hesitation, and knelt beside the drum, which had been turned on its side in the middle of the roadway. A man in plain clothes, but wearing a Salvationist badge, went out to kneel with him, heard him pour out his griefs, and shared the agony with which he fought to be free from some nameless burden. Was it drink, he asked him, or gambling, or women, or any other of the follies by which youth is beset? But the answer to each question was a shake of the head. Perhaps, then, it was the influence of a bad home? At this the lad looked up in sudden challenge, his eyes blazing. So far from that being true, he replied, his mother was a Salvationist—very possibly she was somewhere in the crowd.

Throughout the conversation the singing had continued, with a background of disorder. On the spur of the moment the man rose to his feet and held up his hand for silence. He begged the crowd to give the penitent their sympathy; begged his comrades to help with massed prayer. He told them what

he had just heard, and asked them if they would aid, that night, in making a mother happy. It was an appeal that went straight to the heart of the Welsh crowd, and in an instant the atmosphere of the meeting was sensibly changed. A beautiful thing happened.

There was a stir among the people, a drawing aside to give passage, and a woman, with arms outstretched, came running into the ring with a little cry. Straight to the drum she ran and threw herself down there, with an arm about her boy's shoulders and a look on her face that many who saw it must remember still, though there were those who looked away, as from something sacred. Sacred it was: a mother kneeling in the street and pointing her son to God. The place seemed purged of half its evil, and there was no more jeering among the bystanders.

The procession of the seasons is illustrated in another gallery of slum pictures. Somehow the dreariness of life outside the social pale, where little is seen of the world's incessant spectacles, seems to be offset by a greater joy in festivals which, to a pleasure-sated people, lose savour year by year. Christmas and the New Year mean much to old and young alike, for at these times there is still a wonderful melting of hearts and opening of pockets. All manner of presents find their way to the slum posts: hampers by hundreds, clothing and toys, and Christmas dinners by the carcase. If you would know how many thousand steps the tenements contain, and with what lightness of heart and foot they may be climbed, a spell of duty on a Christmas Eve is the very thing to enlighten you. Nor is there need to wait a year if you would repeat the experience; you may take a ticket to Glasgow, or Edinburgh, or Dundee, and taste it all again at Hogmanay. How the Dundee slum folk—they, by the way, have the warmest hearts and the stoutest lungs of any—how they cling to their New Year custom of "first footing!" He who comes first across your doorstep on the first of January must bring you a gift, and Dundee has a fancy for food, with a strong preference for fish. Hawkers parade the streets with barrow-loads of New Year herrings, salted herrings dressed for the occasion in veils and gowns, like brides from the sea A touring Sassenach, knowing nothing of all this, was taken one Sunday morning in October to visit an ancient woman in a Dundee slum. Never before had he been at the meeting-place of so many violently antagonistic fragrances, and there was one among them he could not identify, though it held its own with ease against all

others. It was the First of January herring, pendent from a gas-bracket.

Christmas and New Year are festivals of the material: Easter and Pentecost, festivals of the spiritual, have a well-defined significance for slum post congregations, to whom resurrection and the new life of the spirit are propounded as things intensely real. But, perhaps, it is harvest-tide that shows them at their best, for then they give, and give with a gladness which, more than anything, bespeaks their simple love for God. It is an infinitely moving thing to watch the gradual decoration of the halls with the offerings of those who can ill afford to give a pound of potatoes or a brace of buxom onions. All through the Saturday they come with their presents, and many a church or chapel would feel shame to see the total of them.

There is a story behind nearly every one. The blackberries that filled a big dish at Brighton last year were brought by an out-of-work ex-service man who, having nothing else to bring, dragged his broken body up to the Downs at daybreak and picked the finest before the rest of the world was stirring. A flower-seller, seeing the slum officer in the street, ran to her with her arms full of the choicest chrysanthemums from the market. "Here you are, my dear," she exclaimed. "Take them for your harvest, and God bless you. You gave me a dinner once, when I was starving, and I don't forget it." With other envelopes upon the altar at another of the slum harvest services was one containing fifty-two threepenny pieces, the weekly savings of a woman who dwelt by herself in a cellar and chopped wood for a living.

As with the seasons of the year, so it is with the seasons of life. Slumland is vastly interested in life and death—in births and the dedication of its babies under the Army flag, in humble weddings and funerals less humble—for it is always tempted sorely to run itself in debt rather than stint its mourning. Like a Dutch painting is one remembered dedication. A dark garret in the far north of Scotland. Thick shadows pulsing in its corners with the flickering of a small oil lamp, which threw into high relief the faces of two women. One was the mother, shivering in worn black clothes, the other, a slum officer holding in her arms a puny, wasted child. It was night, and she had been summoned to bless the little one before it died.

With her there was a man who held a miniature flag outspread above them while she recited all she could remember

of the Army's dedication service—there had been no time to search for the book containing the words—and then did what he could to stay the mother's weeping. The baby ceased to cry, and smiled instead at the fresh young face bent down above it: the officer, gripped by the passion to save life, suddenly saw what ailed it. Here was starvation.

Two people hurried back to the slum post and returned with magic baby food. When daylight came young Rob was on the mend: one day he will read, on the fly-leaf of a Bible which his mother keeps, the record of his rescue.

Often, at the other end of life, it is the slum officer who stands between the very poor and the last indignity that can be offered them, that of the pauper's grave. It was the captain and her band of rough women who comforted the last hours of a London ex-service man, dying of consumption. His room adjoined the post, and the women of the Home League sang for him in voices that their husbands would never have recognised. His family had been respectable, and he had a young wife and a widowed mother, but since he left no money and the pensions officer refused his help, a parish funeral appeared inevitable—till the captain wrote a letter to the mayor. Then, indeed, things moved, and the squalid street was brightened by the trappings of a military burial.

Is it surprising that there should be a dread of burial by the parish? Surely there is nothing quite so bare of human sympathy. The hearts of the slum officers ache, when there can be no other choice, for those whose end is loneliness and penury. One such they buried out Custom House way, with the officers as the only mourners. Five others shared the same hearse and grave—six plain deal coffins, with penny handles from the ironmonger's and the names of the occupants stamped upon plates of tin. There was no earth between them, and one of the coffins was very small. Two people followed it, a boy and girl who yet were husband and wife, and they dropped upon it a sixpenny bunch of flowers.

Some touching bequests, and some strange ones, have followed slum funerals, for these poor folk have a way of leaving their little treasures to those who have loved them.

> My insurance money to bury me (writes one in her will) and the remainder to the Army for God's work, for what they have done for me when there was none to help me.

A harmonium represents the gratitude of an old man whose dying wife the officers tended, and to bury whom, at his

express request, an officer returned from the hop-fields. A woman left her wedding-ring; another her false teeth!

And one man left a walking-stick which won a brother's soul. He was always to be found at a certain public-house in a Midland town which the lieutenant used to visit when selling *War Crys*, and unfailingly she had a word with him. One night he put his stick in the corner and went out of the pub, saying to his companions: "If anything happens to me, that is for her," meaning the lieutenant, who had just been in. Five minutes later he dropped dead. The stick was duly handed to the lieutenant, who took it to the brother he had lived with and told him the story of it. From that contact came a conversion.

Even a walking-stick, you see, may have its place in the Great Plan.

GOD IN THE SLUMS CHAP. XII

THIS is an age which is impatient of old mysticisms and greedy of new. It is ready for any adventure in nature, science, or charlatanism, but it will not concede the supernatural. If it professes a belief in God, the belief is, at best, conditional. God must be harnessed to the rules of man. He must consent to abdicate all-mightiness and dwell within the limits imposed by human reason.

To make a plea for primitive faith is, therefore, to invite rebuff. To buttress the plea with evidences which cut right across the reservations of to-day is to run a risk of alienating sympathies for which these chapters are a frank appeal. But because a greater thing than sympathy is aimed at, the plea must be made and the risk taken. It becomes necessary to insist, without qualification of any kind, that in the slum work of the Salvation Army there is positive and continual evidence of supernatural collaboration.

Consider, in passing, the manner of the work's inception. It was no part of the plan formulated by the Army's organisers, but came to birth spontaneously, more than forty years ago, in the minds of certain girl cadets who were undergoing preparation for service in the Training Home. Visitation of the poor prompted the formation of a "Cellar, Gutter, and Garret Brigade," and so remarkable were the results attendant upon

its operations that quickly it was given formal shape. Now this is a remarkable thing, and quite worth pondering, because of all that has happened since. First, the Brigade was organised as such, and controlled from National Headquarters; then it was incorporated in the Woman's Social Work; and for the last six years it has been a branch of the British "field." Its evolution to its present form has marched with that of the nation's social and industrial crisis.

Every life and every movement contains within itself the seeds not only of decay, but of new life. This is true of religious movements, as of all others, and it appears to have a particular application to the Salvation Army. The Army has safely traversed a period of internal difficulty which threatened its disruption; it now finds itself face to face with problems, national and international, whose solution is largely if not entirely dependent upon a spiritual re-awakening. There is exactly the same need for the Salvation Army that there was in 1878, and it must be the same kind of Salvation Army, eschewing mere "respectability," and underpinning the social structure by making good its foundations in the lowest strata. The Slum Department stands precisely for this making good, as the first corps of the Army stood in the Whitechapel days. It points the way, which is the old way, and it is able to promise the rewards, which are the old rewards. Herein lies the importance of the spiritual stirrings which once again are manifest among the outcast and poor at a time when middle-class places of worship are half empty. The hour of supreme opportunity is approaching.

So much, then, for the birth and growth of an idea. By what process has that idea been so implanted in an unbroken succession of devoted women as to have become the dominant impulse of their lives, and to have made of them the force—the "army within an army"—which, undoubtedly, they are to-day?

Now although the slum officer, as a rule, has no voice whatever in her appointment, the percentage of slum commissions against which the word "failure" must be written is negligible; this notwithstanding the fact that, as must by now be clear, the duty is extremely arduous and calls for exceptional qualifications. The explanation seems to be that, either in the training garrison or before they enter it, the great majority of embryo slum officers are conscious of being strongly drawn—independently of any human influence—to this particular branch of Army work. In other words, they experience a

"call." Whence does it come, this call? The answer shall be left to those who have heard it and answered. First take the statements of two officers, one of them a veteran with nearly thirty years of service, the other a young lieutenant only recently appointed. To both of them it came in circumstances which, if a supernatural explanation is to be ruled out, are frankly inexplicable.

The Salvation Army was almost wholly unknown to the elder when she received her call. She was then a country lass who had never been to London, though she lived with her parents in Middlesex. The family were Baptists, and she herself was a Baptist church worker. One Sunday, accompanied by a girl friend, she heard an arresting sermon from a visiting minister. His theme was that of personal service: God, he declared, had a specific task for every individual, and by no other person could that task be performed. Either it was done by him to whom it was allotted or it was left for ever undone. "Make no mistake," said the preacher, "He has a task for *you*"; and to the listening girls his finger seemed to be pointed directly at them. The young church worker in particular was powerfully affected by the sermon. She went straight home after the service, and in the privacy of her bedroom prayed that God would show her what it was that He expected from her.

> Instantly (she says) I heard a voice. It was perfectly distinct and I heard it as plainly as I now hear you. It said, "I want you to work among the poor as an officer in the Salvation Army."

She rose from her bedside in awe, feeling convinced that God had spoken to her. But her own minister, to whom she went for counsel, warned her against allowing herself to believe any such thing. "What you heard, or thought you heard," he said, "was only the voice of your own desire." It is unnecessary to comment on this, except to observe that certainly, at that time, her desires did not lie in the direction of the Salvation Army. But she suffered herself to be persuaded.

A little later she went to live for a while in London, and there attended some of the Army meetings, without at first being greatly attracted. During this period, however, her parents became Salvationists, and presently she, too, was wearing uniform. The sense of a call returned insistently

when she resumed her home life; she volunteered for officership, was summoned to London for an interview, told her story—and was rejected. Her interviewers were kind but firm; they said she would render the best service by helping her local corps. She was puzzled, but not cast down, feeling that, whatever the outcome, she had acted as she had been led. The sequel came quickly:

> That night I had what I suppose you would call a dream, but it was much more vivid than an ordinary dream. I saw myself in the midst of a great number of very poor people, whose faces were very clear. And then I heard the same voice as before, saying to me: "These are the people. I want you to work among them as a Salvation Army officer."

This time she felt no doubt. She wrote urgently to London, asking to be granted a second interview, "as there had been a mistake," and in less than a month she was in the training home. Her first appointment was in Whitechapel, and her first experience an open-air meeting outside a notorious public-house. The doors of the bar shot suddenly open, and a drunken man was thrown violently into the road. She could see his face plainly and her heart gave a leap, because *she recognised it.* It was one of the faces she had seen in her dream and had never forgotten. Then she looked about her in the crowd, and recognised others.

The drunken man followed the march to the hall. A song was sung in the meeting which he had loved as a boy, and the singing of it broke him down. The young officer spoke to him, and he became her first convert, rising quite sober from the penitent-form. Years after, at a meeting in a Deptford street, a stalwart, well-dressed man strode up to her and grasped her hand in affectionate gratitude. It was the same man, head of an endless line of men and youths and women who had made good under the influence of her ministry.

There are some striking points of resemblance between this narrative and that of the second officer, all the more striking because of the disparity in their ages and experience. Let the lieutenant speak:

> The call to work in the slums came to me when I was in service in the country. One day, as I was cleaning silver in the kitchen, I had a curious impression. There was a fan-light over the door, and it seemed to me that the light

coming through it was unusually bright. I looked up at it, and a sort of vision came to me.

Here was this bright light shining down on me, and out of it a voice spoke, telling me I was to go into the slums and serve God there. I said: "Yes, Lord. I'll go if you want me to."

I was a Salvationist and I spoke at once to the corps officer. He was sympathetic, but he pointed out that I should require a considerable sum of money to go into training, and he asked me if I thought that I could raise it. I said I did not know where it was to come from, but if God really wanted me to be an officer He would no doubt provide the means.

We talked it over with my mother. But although she was quite willing for me to go, the money was a real difficulty. So I said: "Mother, there is only one thing to do. I shall ask God for it."

It came, in quite an unexpected way. In my spare time I had done a little sick-visiting, and an old gentleman whom I had visited died and left me £50. So I went into training—and here I am.

"Here," in this case, was the inside of a tramcar in Theobald's Road, for the story was told, in answer to a chance question, while the lieutenant was on her way to discharge an errand of mercy. "Visions," for most people, are mentally associated with neurotic and hysterical persons and an atmosphere of artificiality. It is doubtful if in all London there is anything more prosaically real than a tramcar in Theobald's Road: certainly few young women could look less like a visionary than this brisk and fresh-complexioned holder of a penny ticket.

The more one grows acquainted with particular slum officers and their work, the more one senses the method behind their call. For example, the allocation of relief funds and the intricate office work involved in the running of a group of holiday homes, with their associated transport, clearly demand more than the average business ability. Scrutinise a batch of papers and the secret is revealed in the unmistakable script of the Civil Service, witnessing to a call that was answered from a Government post. And so it is in numberless other instances: Someone is choosing carefully, and drafting those He chooses to the work He has fitted them to do.

The proofs next for consideration are those of guidance in

discharge of duty. Every slum post is in a position to deliver them in bulk. Three may be taken, each of them typical, yet each of a different type:

A young woman sat one Thursday evening in the dirty common-room of a lodging-house in a Northern city. Born of respectable parents in a little town of the Scottish Lowlands, she had made an unwise and unhappy marriage, and had been dragged hither and thither at the tail of a man who had now abandoned her in degradation.

She was penniless and friendless; she had no prospect of obtaining employment because of the industrial depression; it seemed that she had come to the end of things.

It was the night on which the local slum officers paid their weekly round of visits to the lodging-houses, and while she sat there brooding they arrived.

One of the two was a lieutenant from her own Scottish home, who knew her—had been her friend—and instantly recognised her, although she hung her head in shame.

Neither had had the faintest idea that the other was in the city. The officers took the girl home with them, and found the man who had deserted her—only, however, to bury him a few days later. She is now a new creature; married again and happy.

* * * * * *

A member of the London Slum Brigade awoke one morning with the conviction that it was his immediate duty to visit a certain East End post. On his arrival there he questioned the officer in charge, and learned that she had that morning been in contact with an urgent case of sickness and want.

It proved to be that of a young woman, in an advanced stage of consumption.

She had formerly been employed by a big firm with which, through a business friend, he had a special influence, and as the direct consequence of his visit the firm made her a grant sufficient to relieve her distress.

The sceptic, of course, sees nothing more than chance in either case. But will he be content with the same explanation in the instance which follows? "Coincidence" is a word that is often more easy to swallow than to digest: he will find something of a surfeit here.

Towards the end of 1928, the Slum Department was faced

with the need for establishing a new centre in South or South-East London. There were circumstances which made the matter urgent, and every post was pressed to make enquiry for a suitable building. The Department's stipulations, however, were extensive and peculiar; and it will surprise nobody with experience of the London property market that the search proved fruitless. Briefly, the conditions laid down were as follows:

The building must occupy a corner site and, for preference, should be a public-house.
It must be in a main thoroughfare, central, and easy of access, but, because of the noise, it must not be on a bus or tram route.
Its lay-out and general condition must be such as to obviate any considerable expenditure either on structural changes or on re-decoration.
It must have good cellarage and storage, a hall (or apartment capable of being easily transformed into a hall) to seat from seventy to one hundred people, ground-floor rooms suitable for use as soup-kitchen and clinic, and at least four bedrooms and living-quarters.
It must be rented, not purchased, and the rent must not exceed a certain fixed sum.

Estate agents made merry over these requirements, and some humorist gave to the quest the title of "The Ideal Home Expedition." "There is no such place in London," was what one of the seekers was told at the offices of a leading property firm.

After months of vain enquiry, the Slum Secretary decided on a change of method. She put the position before one of the members of the Slum Brigade, who had just reported for duty, lent him a motor-van and driver, and invited him to make the finding of the new centre his morning task. The invitation was put forward and accepted in all seriousness, and special prayer was offered for Divine leading. Within a few hours the Army's Property Department was able to open negotiations for the acquisition of what is now the Abbey Street Slum Centre, one of the most important posts in the country. How it came about was narrated by the discoverer at the opening ceremony.

For some reason or other (he said) I came to the City that morning with my thoughts full of Tabard Street, in the

Borough; and when we had drawn blank at the offices of half a dozen estate agents, I told the driver that we would go there. The L.C.C.'s splendid new housing estate at the top of Tabard Street drew us like a magnet, and we went round to the far side of it, to see what might be there.

Instantly, we both knew that we were "under control." That is the best way in which I can describe the feeling that took possession of us. We found ourselves in a long, straight street—neither of us had ever seen it before—and we traversed it slowly, he looking to the right, and I to the left, for what we somehow knew we should presently find. We were in Long Lane, Bermondsey.

After half a mile, Long Lane changes its name to Abbey Street. Some three hundred yards farther on, the driver applied his brakes suddenly, even before I had time to tell him to do so. We were there.

They were there indeed, and the journey had taken them well under an hour. It is instructive to make a list of what they found, and set it beside the list of what they were asked to find:

The building occupies a corner site, and had been a licensed house—a "social club."

It is in a main thoroughfare, in the very heart of Bermondsey, easy of access from the City, the East End, and the whole of South London, but neither bus nor tram passes its doors.

Its condition was such that scarcely any painting was necessary, and no structural alteration whatever.

Cellarage and storage were admirable. The saloon bar needed only one change to make it a perfect hall, seating 100 people: the counter was turned on its side and in that position formed a platform, with a surplus of wood sufficient to provide a reading-desk and penitent-form. Two rooms, opening off the bar, were available as soup-kitchen and clinic, the gas fitting for the soup cauldron being already in position. On the upper floors were living-quarters and four bedrooms.

The building was leasehold, and the terms demanded were equivalent to a yearly rental of exactly the amount fixed as the Army's maximum.

At a time when she was alone in her post, a slum officer in the far East End of London was taken suddenly ill in the

night, and for the time being was totally blind. She felt her way to the house next door, and asked that a message might be sent to the officer in charge of another post, over three miles distant. A note was sent by a boy.

Before he had had time to go a mile, however, the officer whom he had been sent to fetch arrived of her own volition. She had awakened in the night, as if in response to an alarm. "Something is wrong with M . . ." she told her lieutenant; and as the feeling deepened, she dressed in haste, certain that God had ordered her to go to her stricken comrade's assistance.

The final case is one that concerns "Big Brother." He had been called to see a little lad who lay dying in darkness. A tumour on the brain had taken away his sight, and the slow ebbing of his life was breaking his mother's heart. The doctor could give but one slender hope! he spoke of wonderful things which a famous specialist had achieved, and the mother, who had no money for specialists, drank in his words with helpless agony. "Big Brother," at that time, had no money for specialists either, having just paid a succession of heavy doctor's bills; but he thought, as often he has thought since, of the promise made to the inn-keeper in the story of the Good Samaritan, and he gave the word for the great man to be sent for. He wrote a cheque for the fee, and went to his office, to find awaiting him, upon his desk, an envelope containing another cheque—for three times the amount he had just paid —his wholly unexpected share of a business profit.

"*Take care of him,*" said the Samaritan, as he gave into the host's hands the money for the wounded man's care, "*and whatsoever thou spendest more, when I come again I will repay thee.*"

The promises of God are sure.

THIS is, perhaps, an unusual book to have come from the Street of Adventure. I make no apology for it, but a word or two of explanation may not be out of place.

The story of the slums is not for me to tell, nor have I essayed to tell it. I have attempted, rather, to give the testimony of an ordinary man to the truth of things which for years he thought he disbelieved.

It is an illuminating commentary on the state of the world to-day that the discovery of this truth should be regarded by a journalist as "news." But so it is, and a long experience of newspaper correspondence convinces me that it is news for which there is a vast and hungry public. A mysterious Providence—the last three years have made me very cautious in the use of words like "chance" and "accident"—brought me into association with the slum officers of the Salvation Army; the special privilege of "Big Brother"-hood, which has enabled me not only to see but to share in their work, while preserving much of the detachment of an outsider, has scattered for ever the choking clouds of distrust and controversy and shown me the realities. In the slums I have found again the faith of youth. How shall a man keep silence on such a mighty thing? "I believed, therefore have I spoken."

It has seemed to me very desirable, incidentally, to put in a plea for the better understanding of the slum people. We must not make the blunder of attempting to draw around them a sort of "sanitary cordon"—that will be fatal. We must not drive them in upon themselves, compress them dangerously in the social machine—that will be to make them a disruptive force. We must subject them to the alchemy of sympathy and knowledge. We must have, as has elsewhere been said, "a crusade of determined friendliness," and the slum work of the Salvation Army is one of the many ways in which it may be waged.

If only we might have another Paul! Often I hear him, talking to Londoners as he talked to the Athenians. I picture him standing, not on Mars Hill, but on Ludgate Hill, on the steps of his own Cathedral, gazing westward into the street where so many of us spend our time "in nothing else but either

to tell or to hear some new thing." How he would flay us for our superstitions, for our idolatry, for our worship of a God who (we make it pitifully evident) is to multitudes a God Unknown. "Whom, therefore, ye ignorantly worship, him declare I unto you . . . though he be not far from every one of us."

Paul, too, was conscious of a world blindly groping after the truth. What would not one give to possess his power of proclamation, his ability to make it plain that God has never changed?

Religion must throw off its defeatism. Christ is not struggling for victory: the victory was won nineteen hundred years ago. That is what the ordinary man needs to be assured of: the daily victories of a living God over the desolation of the slums should give him the assurance.

H. R.

THE END

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